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62 Blanch and blend for a bright and creamy pesto to use on chicken, potatoes, and pasta (and to freeze for later).



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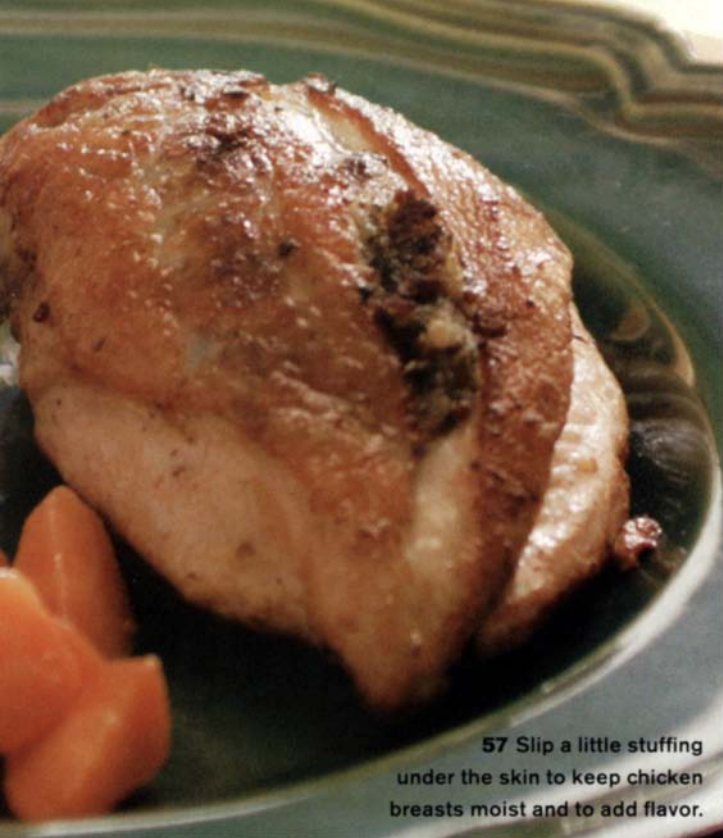


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by Steve Johnson

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For that sweet, old-fashioned flavor, you don't need to bake beans for hours—just turn up the heat

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by Susie Middleton

For perfect texture and more control, parboil ahead of time; at the last minute, season and sauté for flavor

48 A Do-Ahead Mix for Quick and Easy Baking

by Kathleen Stewart

A single homemade mix lets you make delicious scones, biscuits, and shortcakes at a moment's notice

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52 Fill Your Soup Pot with Summer's Vegetables

by Pam Anderson

An easy formula guarantees a successful, flavor-packed soup—and still leaves room for creativity

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by Martha Holmberg

Put a bit of stuffing under the skin to enhance flavor and to keep the meat from drying out

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Blanch the basil first to keep its bright color and to create a better emulsion

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Start with a tender homemade dough and add assertive fillings for stuffed pasta that's packed with flavor

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An open-sided scoop is the ice-cream pros' favorite, but a trigger-release disher is best for batters

75 It's Cherry Season!

by Fran Gage

Cherry-studded focaccia, a creamy mousse, and an almond-topped custard tart make the most of this fruit's brief appearance



CONTRIBUTORS



Alan Tardi ("Ravioli," p.66) was a music student at the San Francisco Conservatory before drifting into the culinary world, almost accidentally, in 1978. A part-time restaurant job eventually led Alan into the esteemed New York City kitchens of Chanterelle, Lafayette, and Le Madri, and a five-month restaurant internship in Italy fostered his passion for traditional, regional Italian cooking. Alan opened Follonico in a landmark building in 1992, and the New York restaurant scene has been a happier and more delicious place ever since.

Memories of his father's backyard grilling still inspire chef **Steve Johnson** ("Juicy Grilled Burgers," p. 36) daily at The Blue Room, his restaurant in Cam-



bridge, Massachusetts, where there's a nine-foot wood-burning grill. (Steve grills at home with friends, too, but the setup is a bit more modest). In 1999, Steve was named

by *Boston* magazine as "Best Chef" in the Boston area, and he's a 2001 James Beard Award nominee for "Best Chef in the Northeast."

Jasper White ("Baked Beans," p. 40) helped put Boston on the map as a culinary destination with his restaurant Jasper's, which won *Boston* magazine's "Best Restaurant" award for eleven of the twelve years it existed. While Jasper's was a high-end restaurant, his newest venture, Jasper White's Summer Shack, is a decidedly more casual place in Cambridge, with specialties such as clam rolls, fried chicken, and, of course, baked beans. Jasper is also the author of such highly praised books as *Lobster at Home* and *Jasper White's Cooking from New England*. His most recent book is *50 Chowders*.

"Fresh Vegetables Get Great Flavor Fast," p. 43, is executive editor **Susie Middleton**'s fifth vegetable-cooking story for *Fine Cooking*. After roasting, grilling, gratinéeing, and wilting, she was happy to explore the lighter side of vegetables; next thing you know she'll be eating them raw and tossing them in salads.



Kathleen Stewart ("Baking Mix," p. 48) runs the Downtown Bakery & Creamery in Healdsburg, California. She also contributed to the Baker's Dozen cookbook (see Fran Gage, bottom right) and is a frequent contributor to *Fine Cooking*. Before heading up to Healdsburg in 1987, she worked at Chez Panisse in Berkeley for twelve years.



Popular cookbook author **Pam Anderson** ("Summer Vegetable Soups," p. 52) is following up her first two hit books—*The Perfect Recipe* and *How to Cook Without a Book*—with a third, entitled *CookSmart*, due out this fall. *How to Cook without a Book* was nominated for a

James Beard award this spring. Pam writes a column for *USA Weekend* and teaches cooking classes across the country.

Martha Holmberg ("Stuffed Chicken Breasts," p. 57) is the editor-in-chief of *Fine Cooking*. She spent three years studying cooking in France, but feels that she's learned so much more during her time with the magazine. "Our contributors are the best cooks in the country. Each time an issue goes to press, I feel like my skills have improved, just through reading the articles and trying the recipes."



Robert Danhi ("Pesto," p. 62) teaches at The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. Formerly a chef at restaurants in California and Hawaii, he was also the executive chef-instructor of the California School of Culinary Arts. When he's not teaching, Robert is travelling the world and exploring different cuisines, most recently those of Japan, Brazil, and Korea.



Joanne McAllister Smart ("Ice-Cream Scoops," p. 72), an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*, ate her fair share of ice cream while testing different scoops. In fact, she put on more than 20 pounds during that time, but most of it had to do with the baby she had this past March. There were, however, no pickles involved.

Fran Gage ("Cherry Desserts," p. 75) owned and ran Pâtisserie Française in San Francisco for eleven years before turning to writing, teaching, and consulting. She recently published *Bread & Chocolate: My Food Life in San Francisco*, and is among the talented chefs contributing to a widely anticipated book called *The Collective Wisdom of the Baker's Dozen*, which includes many *Fine Cooking* writers, including Kathleen Stewart (see above left).

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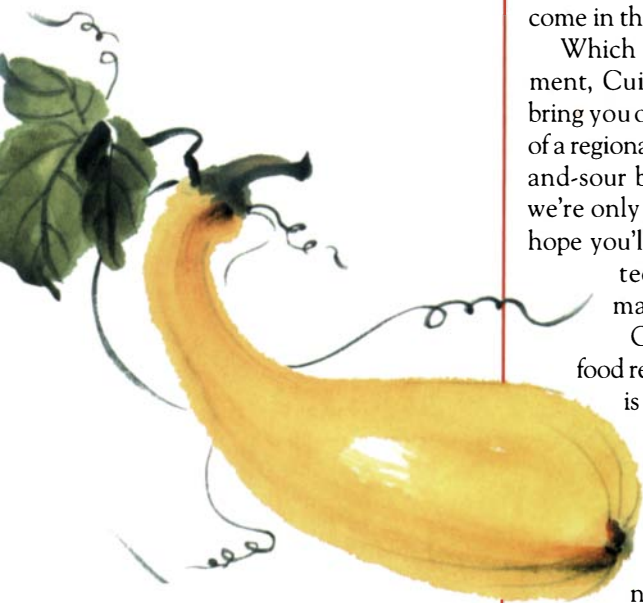
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LETTERS

Here's the place to share your thoughts on our recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com.



FROM THE EDITOR

Cool kitchens and hot cuisines

We're excited about the debut of two new departments in this issue. In Kitchen Detail (p. 30), we explore real-life kitchen design problems and solutions by zeroing in on the small but important details that can have a huge impact on how much you enjoy working in your kitchen. The solutions come from readers' own kitchens as well as editors' finds, so this is a good chance to share your creativity with the rest of *Fine Cooking's* community of passionate cooks. (FYI, we'll be putting some of these great ideas to use as we renovate our test kitchens...more on that as we progress.)

This issue's topic is spice storage. In my mother's day, she had four little cans of ground spices tucked neatly into the corner of a cabinet—not much of a storage challenge. It's a safe bet to say your cabinets hold a lot more than that; my own shelves sport at least thirty jars, cans, and pouches—testament to how much more creative and international our cooking has become in the last few decades.

Which leads me to our second new department, Cuisines (p. 22). In this section, we'll bring you one recipe that expresses the essence of a regional cuisine—this issue features a sweet-and-sour braised chicken from Sicily. Though we're only offering a sample of each region, we hope you'll be inspired to try new flavors and techniques and dive deeper into the many fascinating cuisines of the world.

One of America's most significant food regions (but by no means the only one) is northern California. We're returning for the third year in a row to offer readers our California Experience, a tour of the region's best artisan food and wine producers, plus a day of skill-building classes at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone. See p. 91 for details.

—Martha Holmberg, editor-in-chief

Give whole garlic cloves a leisurely sauté

I truly enjoyed Leslie Revsin's article "Slow-Sautéed Spring Vegetables" (*Fine Cooking* #44, p.40). I find that whole or halved garlic cloves benefit dramatically from a leisurely sauté in extra-virgin olive oil, becoming sweet, soft, and utterly delicious as they lightly caramelize. So I suggest that rather than browning

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garlic slices in a recipe like Ms. Revsin's Asparagus with Pancetta, add whole or halved cloves along with the asparagus, or a little later if you like a bit less caramelization. Slow-sautéed garlic can also serve as a foundation for other dishes like the classic Italian pasta dish of cauliflower or broccoli with garlic, breadcrumbs, and olive oil over ziti.

—Michael G. Kaloyanides, Bethany, CT

I want more Cooking without Recipes

I've become a sauté and pan-sauce-making fool since I received FC #43 ("Cooking without Recipes: Simple Sautés Make Quick & Flavorful Dinners," p. 38). I've

created all sorts of sauces, and my husband is thrilled. Then I noticed the sidebar which indicated that this article was a first of a series. I was so disappointed to find that the latest issue didn't include the next installment. I can't wait.

—Ila Griffith Forster, Reston, VA

Editors' note: We're sorry you were disappointed, but we're glad you were as pleased as we are with the series. We have so many great articles jockeying for position in each issue that we can't run all our regular features and departments every time. You'll find the next Cooking without Recipes on p. 52 of this issue—summer vegetable soups. Look for a great piece on braising shanks and short ribs in early 2002.

Sorting out spuds

Chef Michael Yeamans at Rouge in Philadelphia did an excellent job of demystifying french fry preparation at home with his article in FC #44 (p. 65). Unfortunately, the description of what type of potato to use is inaccurate. The author prefers russets, which the article says "are also called Idahoes." In reference to the russet, Idaho is not a particular variety. Idaho designates a source of origin. In fact, several states grow russets. To be correct, the information should just refer to russets or brown potatoes as a description for your readers.

We're trying very hard not to promote a generic image of "Idaho" being a match to any brown or russet colored potato.

—Don Odiome, V.P. Food Service,
Idaho Potato Commission

The most eligible spatula

As a collector of cooking utensils, I really enjoy the articles devoted to these subjects. In your article on spatulas (FC #44, p. 68), however, you left out a very important one: the classic baker's "icing" spatula. I realize the name icing spatula might lead people to believe it's strictly for icing cakes and such, but let's face it, anyone who owns one uses it for everything under the sun.

I own seven, some offset and some straight, in various sizes. I love my very small ones for little jobs like delicate cookies, and coaxing muffins out of their tins, and flipping blini or crêpes, and I love my large ones for big, but somewhat tricky, jobs like getting under a frittata or a fish fillet. Their narrow width and thin blades



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fine COOKING ...around the country

June 13–14: Editors Martha Holmberg and Susie Middleton teach classes in **New Jersey** at King's Supermarkets in **Bedminster** and **Hillsdale** (June 13), and in **Verona** and **Short Hills** (June 14). Call 973/743-2703 for info.

June 24: Wine editor Amy Albert conducts a tasting, pairing Sakonnet wines with cheeses of the Northeast at the Sakonnet Vineyards Wine & Seafood Festival, **Little Compton, RI**. Call 401/635-8486 for info.

July 11–15: Editor Amy Albert participates in a "Meet the Press" panel discussion with other wine experts, leads a wine tasting, and judges wines at the **New Orleans Wine & Food Experience**. Call 504/833-8008 for a schedule of events.

July 13: Contributing editor Molly Stevens begins a three-state tour of Sur La Table stores in the West where she'll teach classes in **Scottsdale, AZ** (July 13), **Newport Beach** (July 14), **Santa Monica** (July 16), **Los Gatos** (July 17), and **Berkeley, CA** (July 18), and in **Kirkland, WA** (July 20). Call 206/682-7175 for details.

July 17–20: Editor Martha Holmberg also heads west to teach classes at the Cooking School of **Aspen** (July 17-18), 970/920-1879 for info; and at the Cook Street School of Fine Cooking in **Denver** (July 19-20), 303/308-9300.

Plus: Jennifer Bushman demonstrates recipes from *Fine Cooking* on her "Nothing to It" television segments, airing on selected NBC and Fox stations in Nevada, Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.

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—CLS, via Cook's Talk
(*Fine Cooking's* discussion board, at www.finecooking.com)

Susie Middleton replies: Yes, it's true, many cooks use icing spatulas for a whole lot more than icing. In fact, when I started researching this article, one editor told me she didn't own any spatulas *but* icing spatulas. I debated on what to do about this, but decided to stay focused on spatulas that were specifically designed for flipping and turning. That way we can still cover these incredibly versatile tools in a future story.

Here today, gone tomorrow...

In FC #43, p. 22, we told you about GourmetResource.com, a web site that sold specialty foods in bulk at reduced prices. Since then, this site has gone the way of so many other dot-coms. It may be reinvented, perhaps as a sort of online food co-op, but nothing's definite right now. ♦

Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat up; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few min-

utes before the time given in the recipe; use an instant-read thermometer.


In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour

and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that


- ♦ Butter is unsalted.
- ♦ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ♦ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ♦ Sugar is granulated.
- ♦ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ♦ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.



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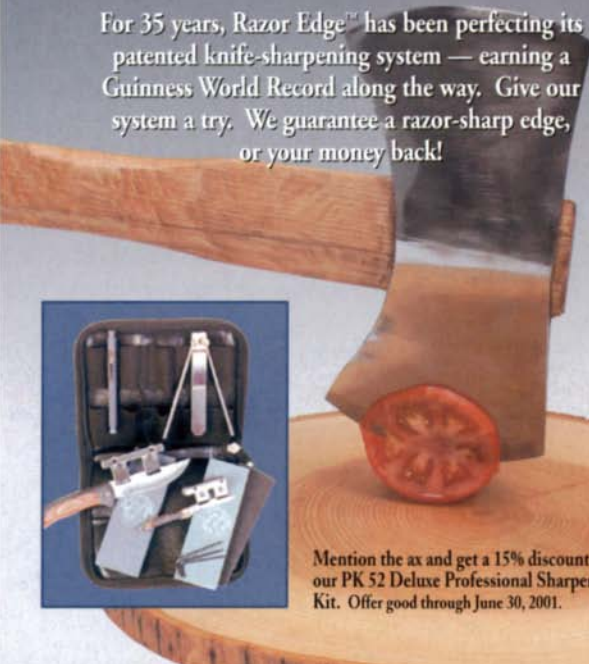
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The Personal Chef Industry is experiencing phenomenal growth. "The demand for Personal Chef Services is on the rise as the benefits of hiring a Personal Chef become more evident. A Personal Chef can make \$35,000 to \$50,000 per year depending upon the number of hours worked and clients serviced," says David MacKay founder of the United States Personal Chef Association and United States Personal Chef Institute. So, what does it take to become a Personal Chef? "Organization, a passion for cooking and a little know-how," says MacKay. If you're tired of working in a restaurant or for a catering company or you're someone who love's to cook but has never had a chance to pursue your passion, then a career as a Personal Chef is the way to go. You can learn all of the ins and outs of being a



successful Personal chef by enrolling in the United States Personal Chef Institute. Upon completion of the USPCI's Undergraduate Program you'll earn a Personal Chef Diploma and start an exciting new career as Personal Chef. *For more information, call the United States Personal Chef Institute at 1-800-995-2138 or go to <http://www.uspci.com>. Training and resources available for all experience levels.*

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BY AMY ALBERT

Seek out local strawberries

Strawberries bruise easily in transit, so buy locally grown ones if you can—or better still, pick them yourself if you live near a farm. Look for bright, plump berries that are fully colored, with bright green leaves still attached. Once home, stash your berries in the fridge—layered with paper towels—and wait to rinse them until just before using (the berries are less apt to rot that way).

Drizzle fresh strawberries with a few drops of aged balsamic vinegar or sprinkle them with sugar and a generous dose of fruity red wine like Beaujolais. For a quick dessert sauce that's great over vanilla ice cream or fruit salad, purée fresh strawberries, strain, and flavor with a little sugar and lemon juice. Or make a fresh fruit tart by lining a baked tart shell with pastry cream or lemon curd and arranging sliced strawberries on top.



Look for slender stalks of rhubarb

It's botanically classed as a vegetable, but rhubarb is best when put to deliciously fruit-like use in pies, turnovers, crisps, fools, and compotes. Choose firm, brightly colored stalks with no brownish edges; slender stalks will be the tenderest. If you find rhubarb with its bright green leaves still attached, it's likely quite fresh, but do discard all those leaves before cooking—they contain oxalic acid, a toxic compound. Rhubarb always needs cooking, as well as a good bit of sugar to coax out its intriguing, tangy sweetness and ruby color. For more on rhubarb desserts, see *Fine Cooking* #14, p. 66.



Meaty, green fava beans

Favas are fleshy, broad beans; although they may remind you of lima beans in looks, they're less starchy and fuller flavored. Choose firm, brightly colored pods that show bumps from the beans inside. Except when very young (a half inch or smaller), shelled favas need a quick blanching so their outer skin can be removed before further cooking: Dunk shucked beans in boiling water for a minute or two, drain, plunge them into an ice bath, slip off the skins, and proceed with your recipe. Stir fava beans into a spring lamb stew, or simmer a vegetable ragoût of favas, shallots, artichoke hearts, asparagus, and fresh herbs. Sauté favas in a little olive oil to make an olive-oil- and garlic-spiked purée to smear on toast or to serve as a side dish. For a delicious fava bean sauté, see p. 46.

Fresh morels are nutty and delicate

At the market, look for plump, fresh-looking morels that feel heavy for their size; skip any that look shriveled. Grit nestles easily in those honey-combed caps, so morels need cleaning before cooking: split the mushrooms lengthwise (they're hollow throughout) and wipe gently

you like, finish with a bit of cream to savor as a side dish or as a topping for mushroom risotto. Or, include peas and asparagus in the sauté, loosen it with more cream or chicken stock, and toss with linguine or fettuccine for an appetizer or supper.

Add small, halved morels to a pan sauce for



with a damp paper towel or a soft-bristled brush. If you must rinse morels, do it briefly and be sure to blot the mushrooms dry.

Morels are terrific in sautés, pastas, gratins, stuffings, and even pan sauces; the spongy caps are great at soaking up flavors. Sauté shallots and morels in butter, deglaze with white wine, and, if

seared steak, chicken, or pork chops.

Morels thrive in the woods, but cultivated examples are becoming much more common, so unless you're with an experienced mushroomer, skip hunting in the forest and stick to foraging at the market. False morels, which resemble regular ones, are deadly.



Cucumbers make cooling salads

At farmers' markets come summertime, you'll see all manner of cucumbers, from long and slender to the short, squat kind shown here, called pickling cucumbers. Look for firm fruits with no soft spots or bruises. Bigger, more mature cucumbers need peeling—especially if the rind is waxed—and the seeds need scooping out (a teaspoon does the trick), but with smaller, more tender ones, you needn't bother. Pickling cukes go way beyond pickles: Toss them into refreshing salads like the one below, or mix thin slices with sour cream, red-wine vinegar, slivered red onion, and fresh dill. Try a raita, the Indian-style cucumber salad made with yogurt, cumin, coriander, and cayenne. Or make a quick, cooling puréed cucumber soup thinned with yogurt and lashed with garlic and fresh mint.

Steve Johnson's Cucumber-Tomato Salad

Steve likes this salad alongside grilled burgers (see p. 36)
Yields 6½ cups.

2 cucumbers, peeled, halved lengthwise, and seeded
2 ripe red tomatoes, cored
1 shallot, thinly sliced
2 Tbs. good-quality extra-virgin olive oil
2 tsp. red-wine vinegar
1 Tbs. chopped fresh mint; more to taste
1 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro; more to taste
1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley; more to taste
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Cut the cucumbers in half again lengthwise and then slice them crosswise ⅛ inch thick. Chop the tomatoes into bite-size pieces. Put the cucumbers, tomatoes, shallot, olive oil, vinegar, mint, cilantro, and parsley in a mixing bowl and toss briefly. Adjust the seasonings and serve. ♦

—Amy Albert is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*.

Have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

Cutting sugar in cakes

I'm trying to reduce the sweetness in some of my cakes, but when I reduce the sugar in the recipes, the cakes tend to be dry and tough. What can I do to balance the reduction in sugar and get close to the original textures of my baked goods?

—Kenneth Lim, via e-mail

Carole Walter replies: Sugar plays several critical roles in cakes and in other baked products. Besides adding flavor, it provides structure, builds volume, contributes moistness, tenderizes, and creates color.

A cake made using the creamed butter method must contain enough sugar to let the butter-sugar mixture expand and create air cells that are crucial to developing volume. The same is true when preparing sponge or chiffon cakes, where the sugar is beaten into the eggs. Without enough sugar, fewer air cells form. The volume of the whipped eggs will be reduced, leaving a weak structure. Denser batters, such as those for carrot cakes and brownies, rely on sugar for moistness. When the sugar is reduced, the texture of the finished product will be heavy, tough, and often dry.

Because sugar influences so many factors in baked goods, you have to compromise between the level of sweetness and how much of a change in texture and appearance you're willing to accept. Begin by reducing the sugar in your recipe sparingly. I recommend taking away 1 to 2 tablespoons sugar each

time you make the recipe. When you find that the character of the baked good begins to change, you know it's time to stop.

Carole Walter is the author of Great Cakes.

What is 18/10 stainless steel?

I adore my 18/10 stainless-steel cookware because it's sturdy and conducts heat well. What does the "18/10" designation refer to?

—Marla Shepard, via e-mail

Byron Bitar replies: Your prized 18/10 stainless-steel pans have four main metal components: iron, carbon, chromium, and nickel. Iron is soft, so carbon is added to make it hard (steel is an alloy of iron and carbon). Your pans have about 0.1% carbon. Carbon steel rusts and corrodes easily, so chromium and nickel are added to give the metal chemical durability. Your pans contain 18% chromium and 10% nickel, the two numbers in the stainless-steel formula.

Chromium bonds with oxygen, forming a protective layer on the surface of the pans so they won't rust (stainless steel is any type of steel containing at least 10% chromium). Nickel is harder than iron, and very resistant to corrosion, rust, and stains. It gives the pans a silvery appearance.

There are three key features of 18/10 stainless steel that make it well suited for cookware. It's soft enough to be molded into the shapes of pans and utensils; it can hold acidic foods and cold and hot liquids for long periods of time without corrosion; and it's chemically very stable, enabling it to withstand extreme

temperature changes without deforming or deteriorating.

Stainless steel is a very poor conductor of heat. Carbon steel conducts heat three times quicker than stainless steel, pure aluminum conducts heat ten times quicker, and copper conducts heat twenty times quicker. For that reason, good stainless-steel pans have a conductive core of carbon steel, copper, or aluminum. Sometimes the core is in the pan's base and sides; usually it's just in the base.

The surface of an 18/10 pan can be highly polished, polished, satin, or brushed. The appearance doesn't affect the performance of the pan. *Byron Bitar owns A Cook's Wares, a gourmet kitchen-supply store in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.*

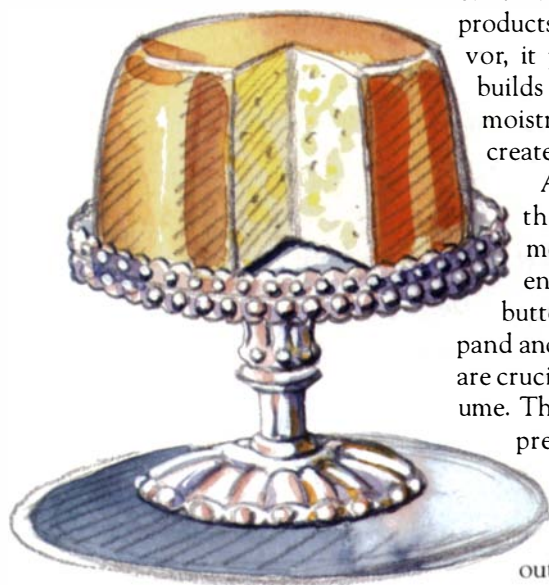
Why does marble keep pastry cool?

I've always heard that marble is the best surface for rolling out pastry dough because it's cooler than other surfaces. But is it true? If marble is at room temperature, isn't it the same temperature as everything else in the room? In any case, why is it so good for rolling pastry?

—R. T. P. Gravely,

Port Colborne, Ontario

Rose Levy Beranbaum replies: Marble (or granite) is indeed best for rolling out pastry dough, not because it's significantly cooler but because it absorbs heat from the dough, helping to keep the dough cool. In pastry making, it's important not to let the dough heat up because the butter can start to melt, which hinders flakiness and makes the dough hard to roll. Marble can do this because it has a high ther-



mal mass, which means it holds its temperature better than other materials. So even as a marble surface absorbs heat from the dough, it still stays relatively cool. If you can chill the marble board first, it functions even better. If your marble board is too large for the refrigerator, set a bag of ice on the marble for several minutes. Be sure to dry the surface before putting the pastry on it.

By the way, I don't recommend rolling pastry dough directly on marble, or any other surface, for that matter. I know that many pastry chefs do, but I find that I end up incorporating too much flour into the dough. Instead, I lay a lightly floured canvas pastry cloth on the board and pull a floured

cotton sleeve over the pin; both of these add just enough flour to prevent sticking.

Rose Levy Beranbaum is the author of The Pie & Pastry Bible.

Keeping the vitamins in your vegetables

I'm curious about fresh vegetables cooked in stews. Does the long cooking time reduce their nutritional value, or are the nutrients retained because you eat the cooking liquid?

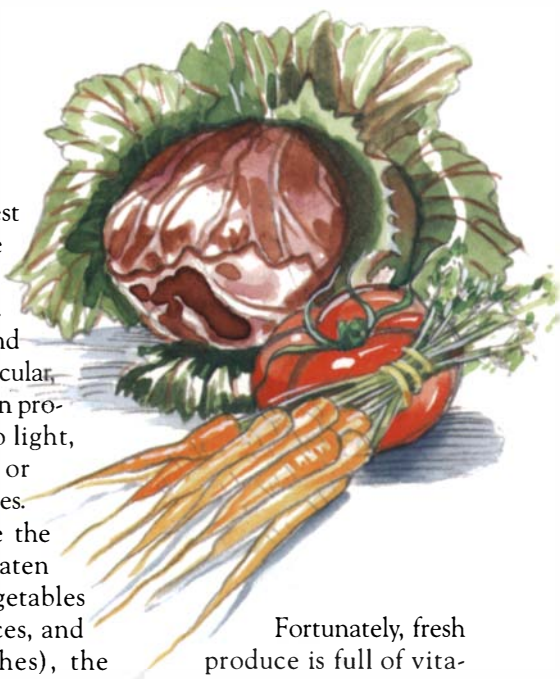
—Betsy Carey, via e-mail

Catharine Powers replies:

Many factors affect the nutrient content of the fruits and vegetables you eat. Variables such as growing and harvesting conditions, handling and storage procedures, and length

of time from harvest to plate can cause some nutrient loss in fresh produce. Loss of nutrients, and of vitamins in particular, can also occur when produce is exposed to light, heat, air, water, or when the pH changes.

In dishes where the cooking liquid is eaten along with the vegetables (soups, stews, sauces, and many braised dishes), the nutrients that are soluble in water but resistant to heat, such as niacin and vitamin K, are generally retained. The water-soluble nutrients that are unstable in heat, such as vitamin C, thiamin, riboflavin, and vitamin A, are not.




Fortunately, fresh produce is full of vitamins, minerals, and fiber, so even though some nutrients might be lost in the process, cooked vegetables and fruits remain very nutritious foods. *Catharine Powers is a registered dietitian and consultant to the food service industry.* ♦

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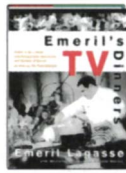
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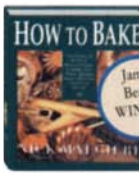
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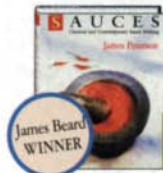
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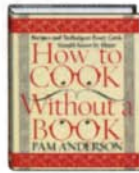
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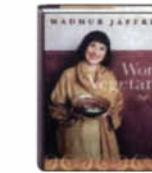
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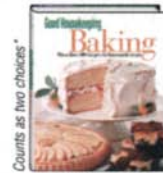
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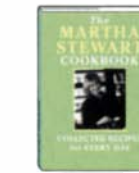
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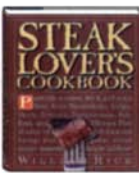
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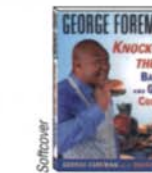
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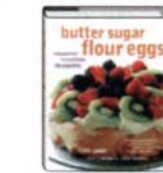
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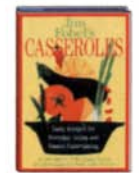
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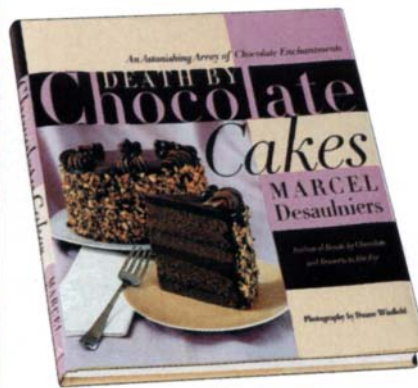
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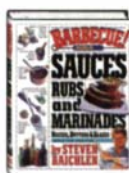
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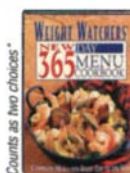
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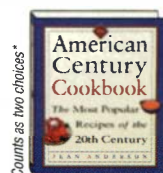
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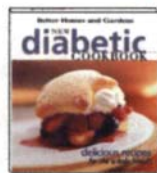
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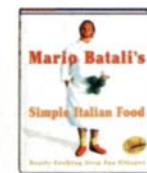
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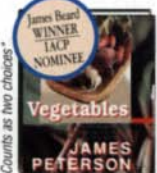
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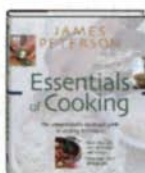
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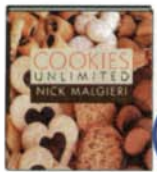
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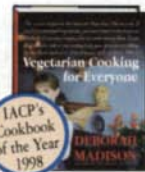
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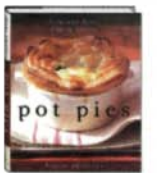
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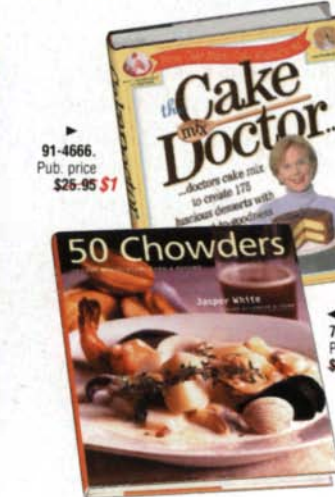
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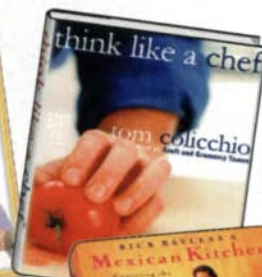
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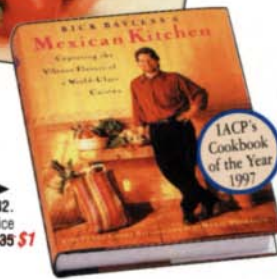
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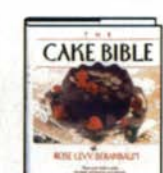
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READER SERVICE NO. 103

BY TIM GAISER

Get to know California's major wine regions

The American system for classifying wine regions—in California and all over the United States—divides American wine-producing areas into regions called American Viticultural Areas, or AVAs.

While California isn't the only wine-producing state in the nation, it does account for more than 90% of American wine production and has over eighty AVAs. A short tour of California's main wine regions will help you get to know them. And while generalizing can be tricky, I'll offer some clues to help you identify typical examples of wines from some of those regions.

The Napa Valley is California's best known AVA, and maybe even the country's. Within it are several smaller

AVAs, including Rutherford, Oakville, Stags Leap District, Howell Mountain, Atlas Peak, Spring Mountain District, and Carneros.

Although Cabernet Sauvignon is considered king in Napa, the valley has smaller sub-appellations with varying microclimates that are good for several different grape types. The cool Carneros region (paradoxically, at the southern end of Napa—it also spills into neighboring Sonoma) is perfect for growing Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, grapes that don't do well in warmer climates. The Atlas Peak AVA on the east side of the valley is a good home for the Tuscan variety Sangiovese. And in Oakville, good Syrah is being grown.

A textbook Napa Chardonnay has concentrated, ripe fruit flavors and aromas that may remind you of green apples or pears. These Chardonnays are often fermented and aged in oak, which confers a creamy texture and flavor, along with notes of the wood itself. Napa Cabernets have dark, ripe fruit, often with herbal-olivy notes and an overlay of oak.

Sonoma County, another renowned AVA, is California's most diverse. Sonoma has many smaller, distinct AVAs within its borders, and temperature variations from one area to another can be extreme. Parts of the Russian River Valley are so dominated by cooling Pacific fog and

California's wine-growing areas contain more than eighty American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) within them.

Mendocino

Sonoma

Napa Valley

Livermore Valley

Santa Cruz Mountains

Monterey

Santa Barbara

Temecula

breezes that ripening grapes can sometimes be a challenge; Chardonnay and Pinot Noir thrive here. Close by are Dry Creek Valley and Alexander Valley, two of the warmest appellations in Sonoma. While Dry Creek is known for superb Zinfandel, Cabernet reigns supreme in Alexander Valley.

Sonoma is so diverse that it's hard to characterize a typical wine. Chardonnays from the cooler Russian River Valley are often leaner, with brighter acidity; Pinot Noirs from there are cherry-like and earthy, with zingy acidity. On the other hand, the warmer Alexander Valley produces oakier, creamier Chardonnays, but it's too warm for Pinot Noir.

I think some of the biggest and best Chardonnays now being made in California come from Sonoma. Try those from Kistler or deLorimier.

The Mendocino AVA is prime ground for cool-climate varietals such as Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Noir, and Riesling, with Anderson Valley as the best-known AVA within it. Even in full summer, morning fogs keep the vineyards from getting overheated. Mendocino Chardonnays have tart green-apple and citrusy fruit flavors; Greenwood Ridge is one of my favorites. Pinot Noir and Riesling from Navarro vineyards are delicious examples of how pure fruit character shines through in Mendocino wines.

The Santa Cruz Mountains AVA is home to some of California's oldest vineyards. It's a small appellation, but the marine climate and limestone soil lend earthy, distinctive qualities that you don't find in other California wines

(the best examples remind me of Burgundy). Pinot Noir from David Bruce, Mount Eden, and Ridge are some of the most complex, age-worthy wines in California.

Monterey County isn't an AVA itself, but notable ones exist within its boundaries.

Cooling fog and breezes from the Pacific are key for appellations such as Arroyo Seco, Santa Lucia Highlands, and Carmel Valley. Not all of Monterey is cool and windswept, though. Two warm inland AVAs, Chalone and Mount Harlan, are home to Calera

and Chalone Vineyards, wineries that make big, distinctive Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in one of the warmest and most arid parts of the state.

The Livermore Valley AVA faces a challenge from ever-encroaching urban sprawl. That said, the area has promise, especially for Cabernet and Zinfandel, because it's sunny enough for good ripening but tempered by enough cooling weather coming in from the Pacific. Concannon and Wente, two large-scale wineries, are located here.

Santa Barbara County, like Monterey County, isn't an AVA itself, but it contains noted appellations such as the Santa Maria and Santa Ynez valleys. Both have a cool, coastal climate that produces Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs similar to those from Sonoma's Russian River Valley, but more herbal in quality. Santa Barbara has the longest growing season in all of California—grapes get weeks more hang time on the vine than up north—and the fruit in Santa Barbara wines has some of the most intense varietal characteristics of any wines in California. Sanford, Qupé, and Au Bon Climat produce some of Santa Barbara's best wines.

The Temecula AVA, located in southern California in Riverside and San Diego counties, had started to show promise as an emerging wine region. Sadly, it has been all but devastated in the past few years by the glassy-winged sharp-shooter, a pest that carries a lethal vine disease called Pierce's.

Tim Gaiser is a master sommelier and a senior buyer for wine.com. ♦

Wine picks

To further explore California's AVAs, try uncorking some of these delicious bottles. Retail prices are approximate. —The editors

Mendocino

Bonterra Chardonnay, \$10
Navarro Pinot Gris, \$19
Fife Zinfandel Whaler Vineyard, \$20

Sonoma

Dry Creek Zinfandel Old Vines, \$18
Landmark Damaris Chardonnay, \$35
Gary Farrell Allen Vineyard Pinot Noir, \$45

Napa

Swanson Estate Sangiovese, \$22
Robert Pecota Steven Andre Vineyard Merlot, \$30
Stags' Leap Cabernet Sauvignon, \$32

Livermore

Wente Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon, \$13
Ahlgren Zinfandel, \$20
Concannon Petite Sirah, \$24

Santa Cruz Mountains

Storrs Chardonnay, \$22
David Bruce Pinot Noir, \$30
Mount Eden Pinot Noir, \$30

Monterey

Morgan Sauvignon Blanc, \$14
Jekel Syrah, \$16
Chalone Pinot Noir, \$27

Santa Barbara

Sanford Sauvignon Blanc, \$13
Qupé Bien Nacido (a Chardonnay-Viognier blend), \$16
Cambria Pinot Noir Julia's Vineyard, \$20



The fruits of Sicily's sun-drenched climate—raisins, capers, and pine nuts in a sweet-and-sour chicken dish.



Because of its unique geography, the island of Sicily—and its food—has been influenced by centuries of invaders: Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans, and Spaniards.

The sweet-and-sour soul of Sicilian cooking

Agrodolce (ah-groh-DOLE-chay)—Italian for sweet-and-sour—is one of the signature flavors of the Sicilian kitchen. Most often created by simmering capers, pine nuts, raisins, fresh mint, wine vinegar, and sugar with meat, fish, or vegetables, variations on *agrodolce* are made all over the island. The most memorable version I've ever tasted was in a family-run trattoria in the Baroque town of Noto, in the southeastern corner of

Sicily. (Sicilian food, like Sicilian architecture, is a fantastic mix of cultures and influences that somehow meld together beautifully; see the discussion below.) That dish was made with rabbit, which is the equivalent of our chicken in Sicily, meaning everybody cooks it. Here I adapt that recipe for chicken, which works very well as long as you stick to the legs, which are more flavorful than the breast meat and don't dry out when braised.

The ingredients that give *agrodolce* its complex appeal

It's hard to pinpoint the exact origin of *agrodolce*, and I've discovered much disagreement among culinary historians. But the sweet-and-sour sauce in my recipe seems to borrow a little from many of Sicily's culinary influences. Sicily's cuisine developed over the centuries in successive waves, with each new invading culture—Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Saracen (Arab), Norman (French), and Spanish—adding its own touches. The combination of pine nuts with raisins may be originally Arab, for example, and many *agrodolce* vegetable dishes, such as *caponata* (a sweet-and-sour appetizer usually made with eggplant), are thought to have both Arab and Spanish ancestors.

Capers

The Sicilian islands of Pantelleria, Salina, and Lipari produce the best capers in the world. They are salt-packed and have a beautiful floral flavor, lacking the harshness of many of the vinegar- or brine-packed varieties. The ones from Pantelleria

are my favorites. They're now fairly easy to find in gourmet and Italian specialty shops, usually packaged in plastic bags and able to last almost indefinitely. To prepare them for cooking, take out as much as you need from the bag and soak them in several changes of cool water for about 20 minutes. Give the capers a final rinse and drain.



Olive oil

Ravida, an old Sicilian family estate, produces a special, elegant oil pressed from green olives (see Resources, p. 24). It's light-textured but has a spicy and very fruity

finish. I save it to drizzle uncooked onto finished Sicilian dishes and salads. U Trappitu is another highly recommended artisanal Sicilian oil. Biancolilla and Coluccio are good, medium-priced Sicilian "supermarket" brands that I use for cooking.

Olives

There's an astonishing variety of olives for sale at Vucciria, the overflowing outdoor market in

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Palermo (Sicily's capital). In the U.S., you can buy imported Sicilian olives, but the options are limited. I find the cracked green types most often in Italian markets; usually they're flavored with fennel or hot pepper. My favorite green olives are from Castelvetro, a town on the African side of Sicily; these are very good to cook with. I also like the brownish-green Nocellara olives I find in Italian markets here. They're used for pressing but also make good eating olives.

A popular variation on *agrodolce* includes green Sicilian olives. Called *sugo alla stemperata*, it's made most often with rabbit or quail, but also with tuna or swordfish, the two best-loved fish from local waters. You can easily change the recipe here to a *stemperata* by increasing the

celery to three small ribs, omitting the pine nuts, and adding eight pitted, chopped green Sicilian olives (preferably without added flavorings) to the sauce when you add the capers and raisins.

Vinegar and sugar

As I've noted, there are many versions of *agrodolce* found in Sicily, some containing almonds instead of pine nuts, some basil instead of mint, some made with red wine and red-wine vinegar, others spiked with saffron or anchovy, and some containing hints of orange-flower water. The constant through all of them has been the cooking down of vinegar and sugar until they infuse the meat, fish, or vegetables with their combined sweet but slightly sharp flavor.

RECIPE

Sweet & Sour Sicilian Braised Chicken (*Pollo Agrodolce*)

In Sicily, this dish would be served with a vegetable like artichokes or sautéed greens, probably after a simple pasta. For a one-course meal, I like serving the chicken with plain couscous, which is not at all traditional (in Sicily, couscous is usually only served with a fish stew). *Serves four.*

4 whole chicken legs, cut into thighs and drumsticks (3½ to 4 lb. total)

Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Flour for dredging

½ cup olive oil; plus a drizzle of your best extra-virgin oil to finish the dish

1 small onion, cut into small dice

1 small rib celery, cut into small dice

1 small carrot, cut into small dice

1 Tbs. sugar

2 Tbs. good-quality white-wine vinegar (you might need a bit more, depending on the strength of your vinegar)

½ cup dry white wine

1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock

1 bay leaf

¼ cup golden raisins

¼ cup pine nuts, lightly toasted

2 Tbs. capers, preferably salt-packed Sicilian capers (see Resources, at right), soaked in cool water and rinsed

A few large sprigs fresh mint, leaves lightly chopped (about 2 Tbs.); plus a few sprigs for garnish

Pat the chicken pieces dry, season them with salt and pepper, and dredge them lightly in the flour, tapping off any excess. Heat a large sauté pan fitted with a lid over medium-high heat and add the ½ cup olive

oil. When the oil is hot, add the chicken pieces (in batches, if necessary), browning them very well on both sides. When browned, remove the chicken from the pan and set aside. Pour off all but about 3 Tbs. of the fat from the pan.

Turn the heat to medium low and add the onion, celery, and carrot. Sauté until they're soft and fragrant, about 6 or 7 min. Add the sugar and vinegar to the pan and let it bubble for about 1 min. Return the chicken pieces to the pan and turn them over in the vegetables once or twice to coat them. Increase the heat to medium and add the wine, letting it boil until almost evaporated. Add the chicken stock and bay leaf, cover the pan, and simmer on low heat until the chicken is just about tender, 30 to 35 min., turning the pieces once or twice during cooking. Add the raisins, pine nuts, and capers and simmer to blend the flavors, about 5 min. longer. The sauce should be reduced and thickened but still pourable. If it looks too dry, add a splash of chicken stock or water. Taste for seasoning. It should have a nice balance between sweet and sour but not be too aggressive. Add more salt, pepper, a splash of vinegar, or a pinch of sugar to balance the flavors.

Arrange the chicken on a large serving platter. To the pan, add a drizzle of your best extra-virgin olive oil and the chopped mint and mix it into the sauce. Pour the sauce over the chicken and garnish with the mint sprigs.

Resources

Esperya, an online retailer of Italian specialties, carries U Trappitu extra-virgin olive oil and salt-packed capers, 877/907-2525 or www.esperya.com.

Ravida olive oil, as well as salt-packed capers, are available from Zingerman's, an excellent mail-order food company, 888/636-8162 or www.zingermans.com.

Books

Some of my favorite books about Sicilian cooking include:

Pomp and Sustenance, by Mary Taylor Simeti (Knopf).

Foods of Sicily and Sardinia, by Giuliano Bugialli (Rizzoli).

The Flavors of Sicily, by Anna Tasca Lanza (Clarkson Potter).

La Cucina Siciliana di Gangivecchio, by Wanda & Giovanna Tornabene (Knopf).

Erica DeMane is a chef, a teacher, and the author of Pasta Improvisata: How to Improvise in Classic Italian Style. ♦



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Ace Cider, a delicious hard cider made entirely from Sonoma County apple juice, is a refreshing summer quaff. Fermented apple, berry, and pear ciders all have an appealingly floral nose, delicious tart flavors, and a dry finish. I especially liked the pear cider's fresh aroma and sassy taste (both the pear and berry ciders start as apple cider and contain a touch of natural fruit essence). At a tame 5% alcohol (less than half that of wine), Ace ciders make for great sipping on their own. And they'd partner well with nibbles like smoked salmon, salted nuts, and semisoft cheeses, as

well as with Asian dishes that contain a touch of sweetness (think Indian curry, Thai noodles, Chinese spring rolls, shrimp with dipping sauce), or even grilled pork loin or burgers.

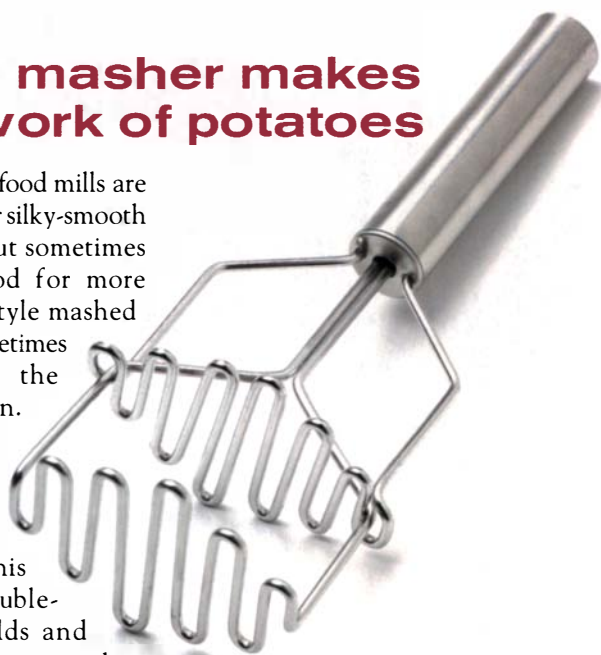
Ace Fermented Ciders, about \$7 per six-pack, are available at national grocery chains including Albertson's in southern California, Florida, and Idaho, Kroger's in Texas, Safeway in northern California, and Treasure Island stores in Chicago. For where else to buy, call 707/829-1101, visit www.acecider.com, or e-mail info@acecider.com.

—Amy Albert, associate editor

Double masher makes quick work of potatoes

Potato ricers and food mills are the tools to use for silky-smooth potato purées, but sometimes I'm in the mood for more rustic, country-style mashed potatoes, and sometimes I like to leave the potato skins on.

That's when this potato masher comes in handy. Unlike single-plate mashers, this spring-loaded double-plate masher folds and fluffs the potatoes as it mashes them, resulting in a deliciously light yet substantial consistency. And of course, it works just as well for mashing other root vegetables and for making chunky applesauce or other fruit sauces. Because of its sturdy design and 18/8 stainless-steel construction, this should



be the last potato masher you'll ever need to buy. Sur La Table sells the masher for about \$12 in its stores. Or order online at www.surlatable.com, or by calling 800/243-0852.

—Jennifer Armentrout, assistant editor

USDA finalizes national organic standards

We've all seen foods labeled "organic" at the market, but until very recently, there was no knowing what that label really meant because organic standards varied from state to state. But on December 21, 2000, the United States Department of Agriculture finalized the standards for its National Organic Program. Ten years in the making, the standards provide a national definition of the term "organic" by detailing the methods and substances that can be used in producing and handling organic crops, livestock, and processed products. The program also calls for the USDA to enforce the import of only qualified organic products to the U.S., preventing mislabeled products from entering the country. We can expect to see new organic labeling (made consistent by the standards) on foods beginning this summer, with full implementation by mid 2002. For more information, visit www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

—J. A.





Exceptional Spanish wine vinegars

Any country that makes great wines also tends to offer great vinegars, and Spain is no exception.

Sherry vinegars, made from the fortified wines of Jerez de la Frontera in southern Spain, merit a place in your pantry alongside your balsamic. One I've grown fond of is made by the winery Sanchez Romate (pronounced roe-MAH-tay). At 8% acidity, it's pretty sharp, but you get a pleasant hit of the sweet wine before the kick. I love its amber color, like a medium-dark maple syrup. This is the vinegar I often reach for when dressing salads, making gazpacho, or brightening a thick bean soup.

For a really special treat, try the Cabernet Sauvignon vinegar from

Cellers Puig & Roca in Catalonia. As rich and complex as an expensive aged balsamic, this is my all-time favorite red-wine vinegar. Sweet with a concentrated fruit flavor, it's my first choice for adding to grain salads, drizzling over meat, or deglazing pan drippings for a sauce. Puig & Roca also make an excellent Chardonnay vinegar, which is bright, sweet, and toasty. Both of these vinegars can lift a ho-hum dish into something superb.

A word of caution: Supermarket sherry vinegars tend to be harsh and unremarkable, so buy from specialty food markets or mail-order sources. A 750ml bottle of Romate sherry vinegar is



\$19 from Zingerman's (888/636-8162). Puig & Roca vinegars, which also go by the name Forum, are sold by Zingerman's and by Formaggio Kitchen (888/212-3224) for about \$11 for 250ml.

—Sarah Jay, associate editor ♦

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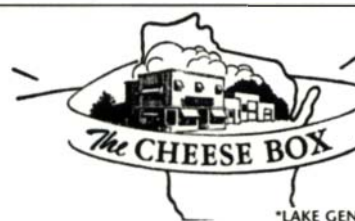
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BY JAMES PETERSON

Cooking *en papillote* seals in flavor

Cooking *en papillote* (French for “in paper” and pronounced ahn pah-pee-YOHT) is simply a fancy way of saying “baking in a bag.” The technique involves sealing whatever it is you’re baking in a parchment or foil packet before you bake it. The paper or foil traps the steam from the cooking food, resulting in a moist and juicy finished dish. As the papillotes bake, the steam causes them to puff up and when you cut into them, you are rewarded with a cloud of aromatic steam—the perfect way to bring a little drama to the dinner table.

Papillotes make great dinner-party fare

You can prepare papillotes an hour or two ahead of time,

which makes them great to serve if you’re having guests. All you have to do is slide the papillotes into a heated oven and wait for them to puff. There’s no slaving away in the kitchen while your guests enjoy themselves without you.

Papillotes make their own sauce because the juices released by whatever it is you’re cooking—I usually reserve the technique for fish—mingle with any liquid you may have added (usually wine or broth, or both).

You can construct a complete meal *en papillote*. First, arrange cooked vegetables in the bag (I’m especially fond of lightly creamed spinach or sliced leeks cooked first in butter), and then place meat, seafood, or poultry on top.



Foods cooked “en papillote”—in a paper bag—emerge succulent and saturated with flavor.

Next, top the food with other ingredients such as herb butter, sautéed mushrooms, or finely sliced truffles, and sprinkle over a little white wine or Madeira before sealing the bag.

Parchment or foil will do the job

Though aluminum foil works fine, kitchen parchment has an advantage because it turns brown in the oven as the food cooks. This helps you know when the food is done, and it’s

certainly more attractive than foil. If you decide to use parchment, you can find it in 12-inch wide rolls at the supermarket or in 12x16-inch single sheets from kitchen-supply stores or by mail order (see Sources, p. 84). If you’re using a roll of parchment, cut off a sheet about 19 inches long for each papillote. If you’re using pre-cut parchment, just use one whole sheet per papillote. Whatever you do, don’t use waxed paper; the wax will melt.

Prep your components ahead



Chop the tarragon with the butter. This way, the leaves are immediately coated and don’t turn black. If you’re using parsley, this isn’t an issue. Just chop the parsley fine and work it into the butter in a bowl with a wooden spoon.



Sauté the mushrooms over high heat in the olive oil until they turn brown and smell fragrant, usually about 10 minutes. If they release liquid, cook them until the liquid evaporates. A minute before you take them off the heat, season them with salt and pepper and sprinkle with the chopped garlic. Let cool completely.

Judging doneness can be a little tricky

Because the food is sealed in a bag, there’s no way to poke at it or cut into it to see if it’s done. I usually assume they’re ready when the bags puff up and brown, but I have occasionally done this and proudly marched into the dining room only to find the fish was woefully undercooked.

The only reliable way to judge doneness is to cut into one of the bags on the sly (save this one for yourself). Then you can check the fish by poking it with a fingertip—it should feel firm, not fleshy, to the touch—or by cutting into it with a knife.

Assemble the papillotes



Fold the paper in half as you would a book and press along the fold to make a crease. Open the paper and set a piece of the fish in the center of one half of the paper. Top with a quarter of the mushrooms and herb butter and sprinkle with 2 Tbs. of the wine.



Brush a 1-inch border around the filled half of the paper with some egg white lightly beaten with a little salt (the salt helps to thin the white) and fold over the other half of the paper. Press on the edges of the paper so the egg white seals it. (If you're using aluminum foil, skip the egg white but fold in the same way.)



Brush the edges of the paper a second time with more egg white and make a series of little folds all around the edge to create a seal. Brush one more time with the egg white and make a second series of folds to make the seal airtight. Repeat with the remaining ingredients to make three more papillotes.

Bake and serve right away



Arrange the papillotes on a baking sheet without overlapping. Bake in a 425°F oven for about 10 minutes per inch of thickness of the fillets. Serve immediately, as they'll deflate as they cool.

Play up the drama of cooking *en papillote*

There are a number of ways to serve foods cooked *en papillote*. To be dramatic, slide each of the cooked, puffed up papillotes onto heated plates or soup plates and pass a pair of scissors around the table for guests to cut into their own. The only downside to this approach is that your guests end up eating out of a

paper or aluminum bag—not terribly elegant.

I like to bring the whole baking sheet to the table (I never try this at a dinner for more than six), along with a stack of heated plates. Then I can cut open the papillotes in front of the guests and spoon the contents onto the plates. They get all of the drama with none of the fast-food trappings.

Fish Fillets *En Papillote*

Plan on heating the oven to 425°F about 20 minutes before you're ready to bake the papillotes. *Serves four as a main course.*

Leaves from 1 small bunch fresh tarragon or flat-leaf parsley
4 Tbs. unsalted butter
¾ lb. wild or cultivated mushrooms, thickly sliced or quartered
2 Tbs. olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 small clove garlic, finely chopped
1½ to 2 lb. fish fillets (such as salmon, halibut, or cod), skin removed, cut into four pieces of equal thickness, seasoned with salt and pepper
½ cup dry white wine, Madeira, or good dry sherry
1 egg white (if you're using parchment)

For the method, follow the photos starting on p. 28.

While I hesitate to give recipes for dishes that are the result of my own last-minute whims for turning a limited collection of ingredients into something impressive, here's one to get you started. Remember, you can vary any of the ingredients to suit your

mood or the contents of your refrigerator.

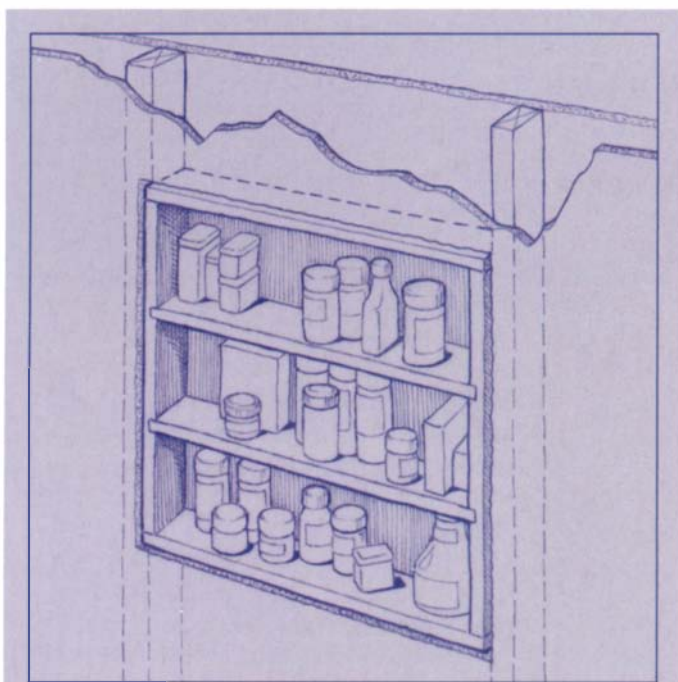
James Peterson, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, has written many cookbooks, including Fish & Shellfish and Sauces. His latest is Simply Salmon. ♦

Does your kitchen have a feature that really works?

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Cool places to store spices

Perhaps you get by with just half a dozen dried herbs and spices, or maybe you've got forty or more in your collection. Either way, smart storage is essential. To stay vibrant, these flavorings should be kept in a cool, dark place—heat and light quickly diminish their potency. And yet you also want them within easy reach while cooking. Finding a balance between ideal storage conditions and instant accessibility is the challenge. Here you'll find a variety of design solutions, along with a few quick fixes (see Sources, p. 84, for specific products). They just might help spice up your life.



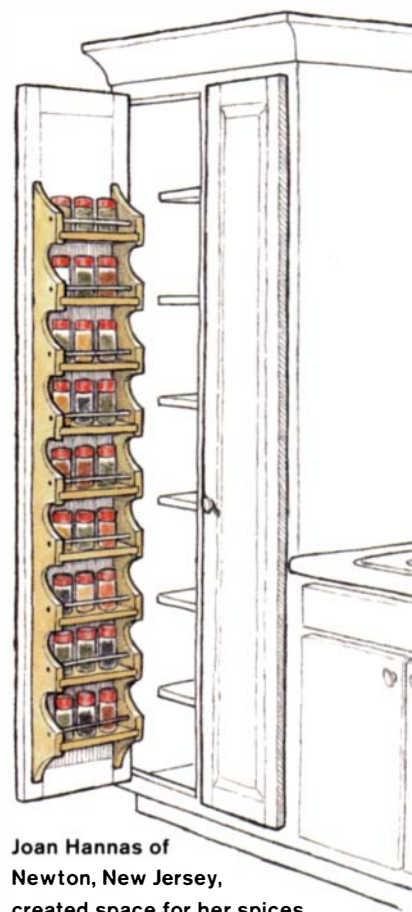
Build a spice shelf into a wall

Transform an unused wall into built-in spice shelves, as Sally Wissel of Atlanta did during a kitchen renovation. The space between wall studs (called a stud bay) typically measures 14½ inches, offering ample room for a space-saving, 3½-inch-deep shelf. Most spice jars are

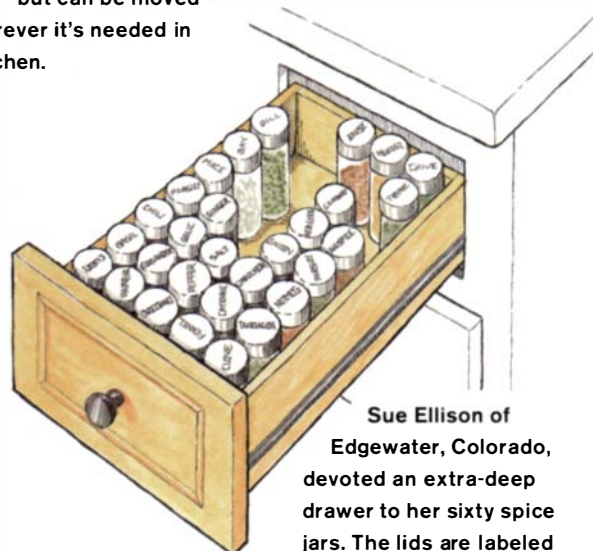
about 4½ inches high, but you might want to include a taller shelf for supersize containers. Build the shelf first and then nail it into the stud bay with shims. (Be sure the wall is free of wiring or pipes. And if you don't know your shims from your studs, find a builder who does.)



Mark Campbell of Edina, Minnesota, picked up an attractive Indian wooden spice holder while travelling. It's small—it holds seven spices—but can be moved to wherever it's needed in the kitchen.



Joan Hannas of Newton, New Jersey, created space for her spices on the inside door of a tall cabinet. Be sure the cabinet shelves are recessed enough to accommodate the depth of the door shelves.



Sue Ellison of Edgewater, Colorado, devoted an extra-deep drawer to her sixty spice jars. The lids are labeled for easy recognition.

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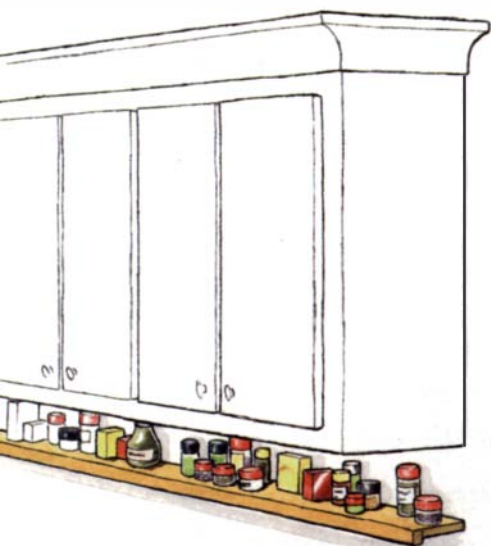
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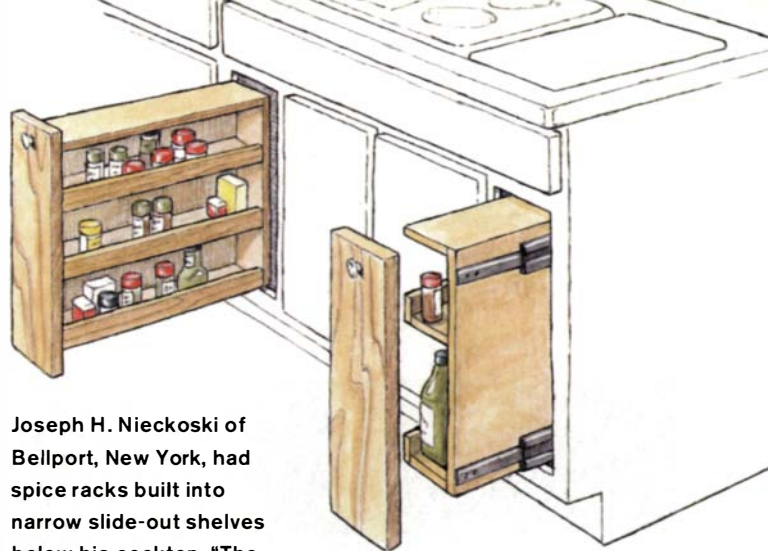
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If you like the idea of seeing and reaching all of your spices without opening doors or drawers, consider lining them up single file (alphabetically, for unbeatable efficiency) on a shallow shelf under a long run of cabinets. The shelf could be attached to the cabinetry or simply affixed directly to the wall.



Joseph H. Nieckoski of Bellport, New York, had spice racks built into narrow slide-out shelves below his cooktop. "The idea was sort of like being in the cockpit of an airplane," he says. The slide-out racks put everything within reach, and they're retractable when not in use. Before installing any kind of spice storage near an oven or cooktop, be sure the area doesn't get too warm.

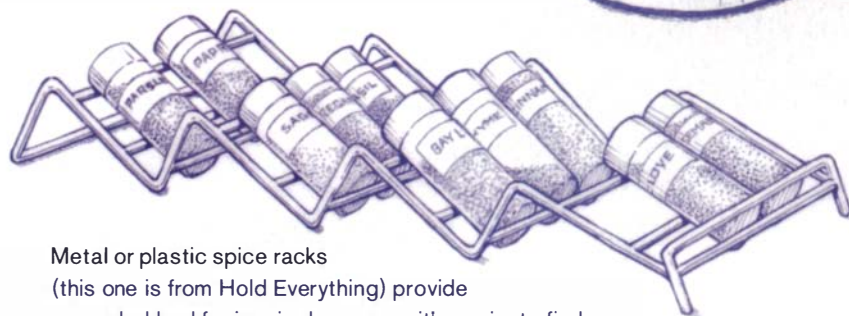
Get organized with these spice holders



Metal jars with transparent lids protect spices from light but still let you identify the contents when viewed from above. The ones shown here, from Lee Valley Tools, have stainless-steel bodies and screw-off lids with glass insets.



Revolving spice caddies hold a dozen or so glass jars (included in this set from Crate & Barrel) and can sit on a counter or in a cabinet.



Metal or plastic spice racks (this one is from Hold Everything) provide an angled bed for jars in drawers so it's easier to find the spice you want when you want it.

Short on space?

Laura Minne of Boise, Idaho, uses stackable plastic bins sold at bath and home stores to hold batches of spice bottles. You can stack the bins, making storage more compact. It's a good idea to label the lids not only with the spice name but with the date as well. Most spices should be replaced after six months.



David Michael Cane of Solvang, California, incorporated a spice alcove into his cooking island. Because one side of the island is raised, he gained a cubby hole for spices on both sides of the stove. ♦

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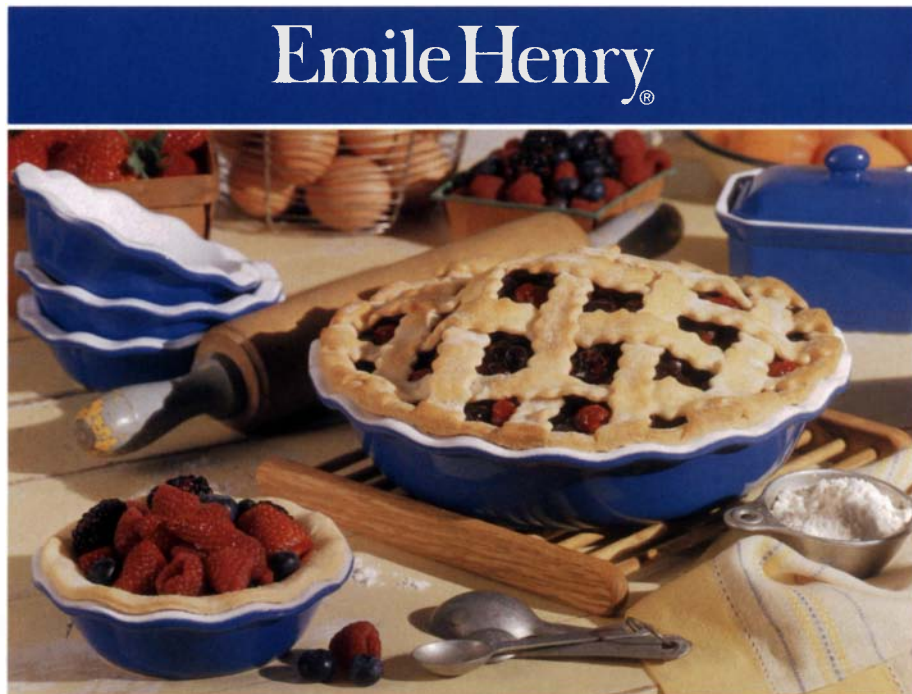
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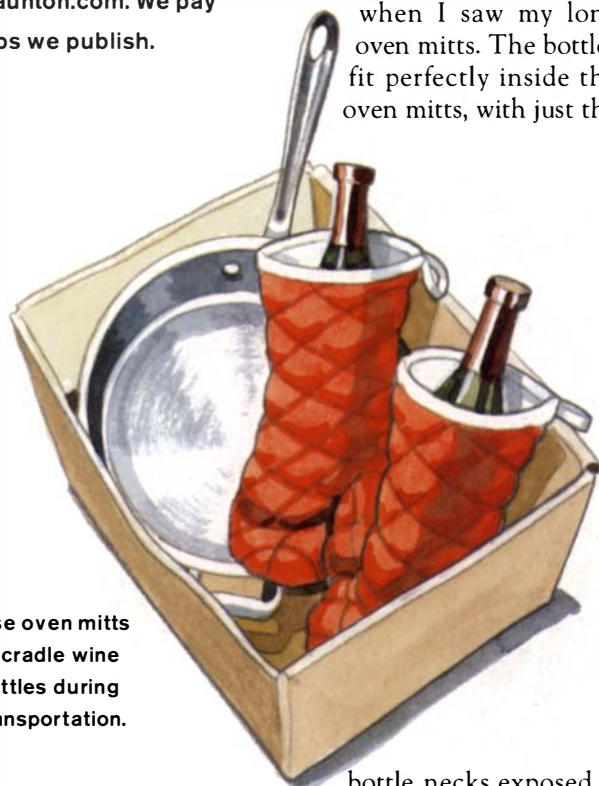
TIPS

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Oven mitts transport wine bottles safely

Recently, while on my way to a family dinner party I was helping to cook, I packed a large box full of food and was looking around for something to cushion the wine bottles when I saw my long oven mitts. The bottles fit perfectly inside the oven mitts, with just the



Use oven mitts to cradle wine bottles during transportation.

bottle necks exposed. I stood them upright in the box. The oven mitts also came in handy during cooking later on.

—Patricia Yates,
Manhattan Beach, CA

Decorate cakes perfectly with melted chocolate

I've developed an anxiety-free way to decorate cakes for special occasions. I usually make a hazelnut fudge torte with a hard, smooth chocolate glaze and then pipe out decorations with melted white chocolate. Lacking both talent and confidence, I used to get nervous as I held my piping bag and started to decorate that perfect dark

brown canvas. Mistakes were inevitable. Now I pipe the white chocolate onto a baking sheet lined with waxed paper. I make little stars or decorative squiggles or I write "Happy Birthday" or some other message. I do this as many times as necessary until I get it right. Once these harden, I carefully peel them off and arrange them on the cake. I never fail to get comments on how great the cake looks, and nobody guesses what a klutz I really am with a piping bag. This method should work with any icing that hardens as it dries, such as royal icing.

—Barbara Minish,
Ottawa, Ontario

A rubber spatula helps free a cake from its pan

I use a narrow, 1-inch, heat-resistant rubber spatula to help dislodge cakes from the pans instead of running a knife around the edge. The spatula doesn't tear the cake and separates it from the pan more easily.

—Elaine Hankinson,
Hayden, ID

Soak wood chips in fruit juice for great flavor

I get great flavors from the grill by soaking my barbecue wood chips in either apple juice (great with pork), pineapple juice (great for wood-roasted fish), cranberry juice or orange juice (great with chicken). I'll never go back to soaking my wood chips in water again.

—Grant Grizzard,
Nashville, TN

Jazz up the flavor of grocery-store berries

If the berries you bring home from the store lack the perfume and flavor you hoped for, try adding a couple of drops of rose water, which is quite inexpensive in Middle Eastern markets. Rose water also makes perfectly ripe, flavorful berries even more luscious.

—Angela Urciuoli,
Salinas, CA

Keep grilled chicken moist and flavorful

When I recently visited my parents in Palm Harbor, Florida, I picked up a neat barbecue tip. My father was



For stress-free decorating, pipe frosting onto waxed paper, let it harden, and then transfer to the top of your cake.



grilling chicken and wanted to keep it moist, so he placed a small pan of water in the grill and added a handful of thyme and rosemary sprigs to the water. The herbs added a great flavor and fragrance to everything cooked on the grill, while the steam from the water kept the chicken moist.

—Catherine Florko,
Tallahassee, FL

A better way to chop rosemary

I've always found chopping fresh rosemary somewhat of a challenge because the needles tended to fly off the cutting board once you started chopping with a sharp knife. While following a recipe calling for freshly chopped rosemary and basil leaves, I decided to fold the rosemary needles within the basil leaves and then slice the basil "bundles" crosswise. After slicing, the two herbs can be easily chopped together.

—Joan Andrews,
via e-mail

For a pretty cake, layer the berries in the cake batter

After making several blueberry pound cakes for gifts, I found that even when the berries were gingerly and delicately folded into the batter, their purple juices left streaks in the batter, leaving the baked cake slightly blue-gray on the inside.

I finally wised up and added the blueberries in a different way: I plopped spoonfuls of plain batter into the cake pan, sprinkled a few blueberries on top, and then continued layering the batter with the blueberries until the cakes were finished. The result was well-distributed berries and a prettier yellow cake. The only trick is to be sure that you save enough spoonfuls of the batter to cover the top layer of berries; otherwise, they'll burn during baking.

—Louise Gallagher,
San Diego, CA

A hot pan is key to stick-free frying

To avoid having meat stick to the pan when you're searing or pan-frying, heat the pan first, then add the oil, and only once the oil is hot should you add the food. To test the oil, sprinkle a few drops of cold water on it; the water should sizzle fiercely. When you first add the meat, it will stick to the bottom of the pan if you try to move it right away. When a good crust has formed on the bottom, the meat will easily release from the pan surface.

—Jennifer Davis,
via e-mail

Cold water removes cheese from a food processor bowl

After shredding mozzarella cheese in my food processor, I stumbled on the fact that if I treated the cheese clinging to the dirty blade and bowl as I do candle wax, it would be easier to clean. Sure enough: I found that hot water only spreads, stretches, and gums up the cheese (especially in the blade holes). By using very cold water, the cheese hardens and comes right off.

—Ana Weerts,
Brookfield, WI

Metal mixing bowl holds zip-top bags upright

While transferring some homemade chicken stock into gallon-size, zip-top bags for freezer storage, I found that the large stainless-steel mixing bowl from my stand mixer held the bags perfectly upright while I poured in the stock. The bowl kept the bags neat and upright until I could seal and label them. I didn't spill a drop of stock. This

would also work with any straight-sided bowl.

—C. J. Moreland,
New Canaan, CT

To save flavor, keep the inner seal on spice jars

I used to often throw out jars of rarely used ground spices (like cloves, ginger, and allspice) that had become stale. Many of these spice jars were still mostly full. I've since discovered that the spices can be kept fresher longer if I don't remove the inner seal on a new jar but just puncture a small hole in the seal to pour out the exact amount of spice I need. The jar can then be resealed with a small piece of tape and the top tightened. This seems to limit the amount of air the spices are exposed to and keeps them fresh longer.

—Lloyd Grable,
McLean, VA ♦



Leave most of the inner seal on spice jars to help keep them fresher longer.

The beef's just half the equation.

"Once I've got the grill going, I turn my attention to concocting tasty toppings," says Steve Johnson.



Customize your burgers. Steve Johnson's favorite condiments include chipotle ketchup, marinated onions, and a savory blue cheese and walnut topping.

Grill a Juicy Burger;

Here's a refresher course on perfectly grilled burgers—with inspiration for savory toppings that make them even better

BY STEVE JOHNSON

Choosing the right ground meat, shaping it, managing the fire, and cooking to the right doneness are all critical when it comes to making great hamburgers, and it does take some attention to get all that right. But after you've mastered the basic burger, you may find yourself wanting more and striving for ways to make your burgers even more delicious. As a burger lover and a chef, I'm continually on that quest—especially when summer comes.

I've learned that the key to irresistible, memorable burgers can lie in the embellishments. So, first, here's a quick refresher on making and grilling burgers that are full of flavor and cooked to your liking. And then, on p. 39, there are ideas for condiments that will give the burgers your own trademark and that will take the classic American backyard fare to a more delicious and sophisticated level. (I've even included the recipe for my killer tomato-chipotle ketchup.)

Photos: Amy Albert



Top It To Your Taste

Use ground chuck that's not too lean and not too fatty

When you're shopping for ground beef, you'll find ground round (from the hind leg), ground sirloin (from the small end of the back), and ground chuck (from the shoulder). I prefer chuck, but round is next, and sirloin (the leanest of the three) is next on my list. The fat content in ground chuck ranges from 10% to 22%, the maximum allowed by government standards. On the package, it may be the percentage of lean, rather than of fat, that's on the label.

For a lot more flavor with just a little more fat, select 85% lean ground chuck. I've found that 80% lean makes tasty grilled burgers but it can also cause grill flare-ups from fat drippings, as well as noticeable shrinkage during cooking. On the other hand, I find hamburgers made with 90% lean to be pretty dull. A certain amount of fat brings additional

flavor to whatever you're cooking, and the meat for burgers is no exception.

Light a hot grill, but not too hot

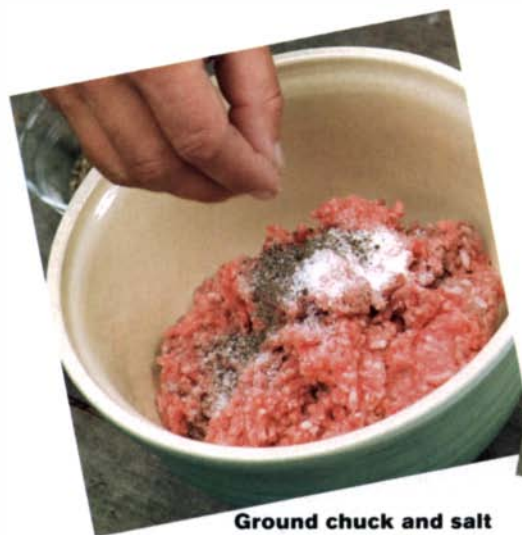
Building a fire for burgers isn't any different than building a fire for steaks or other food you'll grill quickly. I'm a charcoal fire purist, but you can certainly grill burgers on a gas grill, too.

For best aroma and flavor, I like a combination of hardwood logs and lump charcoal to build my charcoal fire. I use these both at home and at the restaurant, but if you don't have logs, an all-charcoal fire is certainly okay. Skip the starter-impregnated charcoal briquettes, which impart an unpleasant, petrochemical flavor; instead, use the stuff labeled lump hardwood charcoal (see Sources, p. 84).

Build a fire that offers different levels of heat intensity. Arrange an even layer of unlit coals across

The best burgers start with ground chuck and get even better with custom toppings.

Simplicity makes the best burger



Ground chuck and salt and pepper are all that go into Steve Johnson's burgers. He uses 85% lean for flavor without flare-ups.



Gentle mixing—not squeezing—will produce a tender, juicy texture.



A generous patty that's not too tall—between 1 and 1¼ inches thick—will cook evenly and fit well on the bun.

the bottom of the grill, rather than a pyramid in the middle. Light one side of the coals (or empty a chimney starter full of hot coals over one side) and let the fire “walk” across the coals. This way, when one area is hot, another will be medium hot. Think of the walking fire as the equivalent of the control knob on your range. You'll have better control over what you're cooking, and an area to move food to if flare-ups occur.

If you're using a gas grill, set one burner to medium high and the other to medium low, and then

add some wood chips for smoky flavor. (Always put the wood chips in a metal or foil container; left loose, they can clog the gas connection.)

The fire is about the right temperature for cooking hamburgers when you can hold your hand two inches above the grill grate for two seconds without yanking it away.

Basic seasonings, generous toppings

After you've lit the fire, you can turn your attention to seasoning and shaping the burgers, and to preparing the toppings and condiments before you get on with the grilling.

As far as seasoning the meat, all you need are salt and pepper; save the bold flavors for the toppings. Let the sidebar at right be your inspiration and take it from there. Think of ingredients, flavors, and condiments you really love. Grilled or roasted vegetables, cheeses, meats, greens, and herbs are all delicious. Try your favorite salsa, tapenade, or chutney recipe. For cheeseburgers, lay a medium-thin slice of cheese on during the burger's final minute or two of cooking, so the cheese begins to melt. My favorites for cheeseburgers are good New England cheeses like Great Hill Blue from Marion, Massachusetts, or a sharp Vermont cheddar like Shelburne Farms (see Sources, p. 84, for how to order).

As for buns, store-bought ones are fine, quickly and lightly toasted on the gentle-heat side of the grill. With due respect to a slice of great bread, it just doesn't cradle a burger as well as a bun does. And rolls are too bulky a mouthful, overpowering the juicy meat and savory toppings. After all, it's about the burger.

When is my hamburger done?

As always with grilling, much depends on ambient temperature as well as fire intensity. Here are some ballpark guidelines for grilling burgers over a medium-hot fire. The times given are for a 6-ounce patty that's 1 inch thick.

Desired doneness*	Approximate cooking time		Doneness feel
	side one	side two	
rare	4 min.	3 min.	center very soft; inside red
medium rare	5 min.	4 min.	center slightly springy; juices not yet flowing from interior
medium	5 min.	5 min.	center very springy; juices flowing from interior; inside moist
medium well	7 min.	5 min.	center firm; inside texture dry, slightly crumbly
well done	7 min.	7 min.	center hard; inside texture crumbly

* Those with compromised immune systems, small children, and the elderly should have their burgers cooked to 160°F to eliminate the very small risk of food-borne illness.

Classic Hamburgers

I prefer 85% lean ground chuck for its nice balance of fat and flavor; if the ground chuck at your grocery store is only labeled 80% lean, choose that over ground sirloin or round, which will offer less flavor. *Yields four 6-oz. burgers.*

1½ lb. ground chuck
1 tsp. coarse salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Light a charcoal or gas grill—If using charcoal, arrange the coals in an even layer and light one side so that the fire will walk across the coals and will be hotter on one side than the other. If using gas, set one burner to medium high and the other to medium low. When the grill is hot, clean the grate by rubbing it with a grill brush and a wadded-up paper towel.

Meanwhile, shape the patties—Put the ground meat in a mixing bowl; sprinkle with the salt and

pepper. Mix gently and briefly to avoid overworking the meat. Shape the seasoned beef into four patties that are about 1 inch thick. (If you like thicker burgers, shape the patties ¼ inches thicker and grill the hamburgers a few minutes longer on each side for the same stages of doneness.)

Grill the burgers—When the first half of the fire has passed its peak intensity and the second half is still quite hot (you should be able to hold your hand 2 inches above this side of the grate for no longer than 2 seconds), grill the burgers to the doneness you like, following the chart at left. Don't press on the burgers; you'll only press out the juices. Transfer the burgers to a plate and tent them with aluminum foil while you toast hamburger buns briefly on the cooler side of the grill, cut side down. Serve with an array of toppings from the sidebar below.

Steve Johnson, an impassioned griller both at home and at work, is the chef-owner of The Blue Room in Cambridge, Massachusetts. ♦

Top off your burgers

A juicy grilled backyard or rooftop burger is deliciously emblematic of summer. Here's how to make a burger even better. *Each topping yields enough to cover four burgers.*

Tomato-Chipotle Ketchup

Purée one 12-oz. can plum tomatoes in a food processor; strain (discard the liquid), and set aside (or use a 12-ounce can of good-quality tomato purée). Sauté one small, thinly sliced onion in a little oil until translucent. Add 2 Tbs. brown sugar; cook for 2 min. Stir in the tomato purée, 2 tsp. tomato paste, 2 canned chipotle chiles (seeded and minced), 2 Tbs. cider vinegar, and 2 tsp. ground coriander. Simmer until thickened, about 25 min. Taste and adjust seasonings and let cool.

Prosciutto & Arugula

Top each burger with one slice of folded prosciutto, a pinch of ground black pepper, and an arugula leaf.

Roasted Red Bell Pepper

Grill or roast a red bell pepper; seal in a bag to steam. Combine 1 tsp. aged sherry vinegar, 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, ½ tsp. coarse salt, ¼ tsp. ground black pepper,

and ⅛ tsp. crushed red chile flakes. Peel and seed the pepper, separate the lobes at their natural clefts (or cut into wide strips), toss in the marinade, and let sit for about 20 min. Top each burger with a slice or two of the marinated pepper pieces and a slice of goat cheese.

Bacon & Cheese

Brown 8 slices good-quality bacon until crisp; drain on paper towels. Top each burger with a thin slice of Vermont Cheddar and 2 bacon strips; move the burger to a cooler part of the grill and cover briefly so the cheese begins to melt.

Blue Cheese & Walnut

Mince 1 clove garlic with a sprinkle of coarse salt and a pinch of black pepper; add 1 Tbs. chopped walnuts. Crumble 2 to 3 oz. blue cheese; mash in the garlic and nuts until well blended. Smear each warm burger with a generous dollop.

Marinated Onion

Thinly slice a small red onion into rings. Add 2 Tbs. red-wine vinegar, 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, 2 tsp. coarse salt, 1 tsp. sugar, and a pinch red chile flakes; toss to blend. Let marinate for at least 30 min.

Grilled Portabella

Brush a large portabella mushroom with olive oil. Grill over a medium fire, turning, until the stem and cap are cooked through, 6 to 8 min.; slice thinly. Drizzle the slices with extra-virgin olive oil and a few drops of balsamic vinegar, season with salt and pepper, and let marinate for 20 to 30 min.

Sun-Dried Tomato & Basil

Chop eight pieces of oil-packed or reconstituted sun-dried tomatoes; drain well. Combine with 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, 1 tsp. red-wine vinegar, a pinch of salt, freshly ground black pepper, and a few chopped fresh basil leaves. (If you're using oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, use less olive oil.)



Real Baked Beans in Half the Time



Hot dogs are just a great excuse
for making one of the oldest and best-
loved American dishes: baked beans.

Photos: Scott Phillips

For that sweet,
old-fashioned flavor,
you don't need to
bake beans for hours—
just turn up the heat

BY JASPER WHITE

Baked beans, first made by Native Americans, have held steadfast as a favorite classic American dish. While there have been some major changes—pork fat in place of bear fat, a pot instead of a deer hide, an oven in lieu of a stone-lined pit—this tender, sweet side dish has not only persevered but is still immensely popular. I know this because I bake more than 100 pounds of beans a week at my restaurant, Summer Shack, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Our Saturday night special is franks and beans with brown bread, and we serve baked beans every day alongside our cod cakes. People also order them a la carte to go with everything from steamed lobster to fried chicken. And I personally think this humble dish is great with roast pork.

There isn't one perfect dried bean for baking; choose a regional favorite

Most Yankees will agree that the pea bean, similar to the navy bean, is the most authentic and traditional baked-beans bean. That is, unless you're from Maine, where the yellow-eye bean, also called the Stueben yellow-eye, is more popular. Still others will tell you that a bean called Jacob's Cattle is the secret to great baked beans.

You can try this recipe with almost any dried bean; I've even had great results with dried lima beans. You just need to adjust the cooking time (allowing more for larger beans, like yellow-eyes), and adding more water as needed. Actually, you need to make adjustments every time you bake beans, as even beans of the same variety vary: older beans, for example, take longer to soften and absorb more liquid.

I've tested this particular recipe with both navy beans (which are easy to find and are often actually pea beans or a mix of pea and navy beans) and yellow-eye beans; both taste great, but the yellow-eyes generally take longer to bake.

Soak the beans in plenty of water overnight before baking. There are those who believe you can

skip this step; I guess you could, but your baked beans will take forever to bake.

What else besides the beans?

Salt pork, which comes from the belly of the pig (like bacon), is salt-cured but not smoked. Look for salt pork with pearly white fat and lots of streaky pink meat. Most supermarkets carry it, but you can substitute slab bacon; the smoky flavor bacon adds isn't traditional but it is pretty tasty. (In fact, it's hard to say whether my family prefers beans made with salt pork or beans made with bacon.) Whichever you use, remove the rind in one piece and add the rind to the pot with the beans; it will give the beans a creamier consistency. Also, if you partially freeze salt pork or slab bacon first, it's easier to dice.

Another break with tradition: cooking the pork until golden. Traditionally, the salt pork should cook slowly with the beans. But I've come to realize that the soft, unrendered pork fat is a textural experience that's foreign to most modern Americans. I now cook the salt pork (or bacon) to a crisp golden color to render most of the fat before I add anything else to the pot. These little meaty pieces seem far more acceptable to the modern palate, and because I leave the fat in the pot, the dish doesn't suffer at all.

Sweeteners, yes, but a little heat is nice, too

The beans in my recipe taste like you'd expect New England style beans to taste. I sweeten them with



The first step to great flavor is browning the salt pork or bacon. Then add the onions and sauté.



Navy or pea



Yellow-eye



Jacob's Cattle



Baby lima



Soft and tender, but not falling apart, these beans are finished baking, so the author gives them a gentle stir to release starch.

equal amounts of molasses and maple syrup, but you can use a different ratio or all of one or the other. I also add flavorings for more complexity but in modest amounts so that the flavor of the bean won't be completely masked. Dijon mustard, ketchup (or my preference, Heinz Chile Sauce), and Worcestershire sauce add a little heat and spice to cut the sweetness. A bit of chopped garlic, sautéed with the salt pork, would also be welcome. I add apple-cider vinegar after the beans are fully cooked, since the acid would otherwise toughen the beans.

Cook the beans relatively hot

Baking beans in the oven provides a steady heat that cooks them evenly. Cooking them on top of the stove would require stirring them occasionally, which might break them up and make them too mushy.

Traditionally baked beans cook at a very low temperature, between 225° and 250°F. I found (by accident, if you want to know the truth) that baked beans can cook at a higher temperature with great success. By starting at 350°F, my beans not only cook in half the time of more traditional recipes, but they also require less tending.

Stir lightly before serving. The beans are done when they're very soft and tender yet still retain their shape. At this point, I stir them lightly to release some of their starch, which will thicken the liquid a bit. Be careful not to overmix at this point. Letting them sit for about 20 minutes before serving allows you to get the hot dogs and coleslaw ready and lets the beans come to their full flavor. The beans will last for a few days in the refrigerator and taste even better reheated.

RECIPE

Boston Baked Beans

The larger yellow-eye beans will take about an hour longer to cook than navy beans and may need more water added as they cook. Keep in mind that all beans will vary in their cooking times due not only to size but to age as well. If you can't find salt pork, you can substitute the same amount of slab bacon, resulting in a smoky flavor that's untraditional but tasty. *Yields about 7 cups.*

- 1 lb. navy beans, yellow-eye beans, or other dried white beans**
- 4 oz. salt pork, rind removed in one piece and reserved, meat cut into ¼-inch dice**
- 1 medium onion (5 to 6 oz.), cut into ½-inch dice**
- 1 tsp. finely chopped garlic (optional)**
- 4 to 5 cups water; more as needed**
- 2 Tbs. dark molasses (but not blackstrap)**
- 2 Tbs. maple syrup**
- 3 Tbs. Heinz chile sauce or tomato ketchup**
- 2 Tbs. Dijon mustard**
- 1 Tbs. Worcestershire sauce**
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- 1 tsp. coarse salt; more to taste**
- 1 Tbs. apple-cider vinegar**

Pick over the beans for imperfections or foreign matter. Soak them in water overnight. Discard any "floaters" and drain.

Heat the oven to 350°F.

Heat a large Dutch oven or other heavy-based 5-qt. pot over medium heat. Add the diced salt pork and cook to a crisp, golden color, letting most of the fat render, about 10 min. Add the onion and garlic (if using) and cook until it begins to soften, about 5 min.

Add 4 cups of the water, the molasses, maple syrup, chile sauce or ketchup, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, and pepper. Stir well to combine. Increase the heat to high and bring to a boil. Add the drained beans and the reserved pork rind and wait for the boil to return. Cover the pot and transfer it to the oven.

After the beans have been in the oven for 10 min., turn the heat down to 300°F. After 1 hour, check the pot and add water as needed to keep the beans just barely covered. Check it again every hour. You may need to add up to 1 cup for navy beans and 1½ cups water for yellow-eye beans, but be wary of making them too watery, especially near the end of cooking.

The beans are ready when they're very soft and tender yet still retain their shape, about 2 to 2½ hours for navy beans; 3½ hours for yellow-eye beans. Remove the beans from the oven and discard the pork rind. Add the vinegar and season the beans with salt and more pepper, if you like. Stir the beans gently; as you stir, the starches will be released and the baked beans will become lightly thickened. Don't overmix when they're this hot. Let them sit for at least 20 min. before serving. They can also be cooled completely, refrigerated, and then gently reheated.

Jasper White is the chef-owner of Summer Shack in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He's the author of Jasper White's Cooking from New England, Lobster at Home, and 50 Chowders. ♦

Fresh Vegetables Get Great Flavor Fast



Like icing on a cake, a quick reduction of cream, lemon, and shallots glazes tender fresh peas.

For perfect texture and more control, parboil ahead of time; at the last minute, season and sauté for flavor

BY SUSIE MIDDLETON

When a classic cooking technique goes bad, things can get ugly: Just think of those watery “du jour” vegetable medleys you get at certain restaurants. These poor vegetables are the unfortunate victims of overcooking and under-flavoring, but it doesn’t have to be that way. I think you’ll be surprised to learn that the very same technique used to cook those vegetables can yield perfectly cooked and deliciously seasoned vegetables.

The technique is two simple steps—one of which can be done up to a day ahead. First you parboil crisp, fresh, green vegetables to cook them to the perfect texture; later, you finish them with a quick toss in the sauté pan with some added fat and

Photos except where noted: Steve Hunter

First step: parboil for color and texture



Drop bias-cut pieces of asparagus in boiling water and start timing right away; cook just until crisp-tender, about a minute.



Stop the cooking fast. Immediately plunge the asparagus pieces into ice water so that they don't keep cooking.

flavorings. Between parboiling and sautéing, you can hold the vegetables in the refrigerator for an hour or two or overnight. With the vegetables already cooked to the perfect texture, the last-minute sauté takes only a few minutes. You're basically reheating and adding flavor, which makes this technique handy for quick dinners and for entertaining.

To keep the vegetables firm and bright-tasting rather than soggy and bland, just remember a few important tips. Parboil your vegetables no more than you need to (see the chart on p. 47), stop the cooking by submerging them in an ice bath, and dry them very thoroughly before sautéing. Also, be sure to have your pan hot and all your ingredients ready for the sauté so that you can finish the vegetables without cooking them much further. That's it. Easy. You may want to adjust the times I've suggested for parboiling, but you'll find that most of these vegetables lose their overt toothiness after just a couple of minutes. The exception is green beans. Personally, I like to be able to bite through a green bean without a lot of resistance, so I parboil my beans for five minutes. They do, however, begin to lose their bright green color

after about four minutes, so it's up to you to decide how far to cook them.

These dishes have a fresh feel, and they let you be creative with seasonings. Another reason I like this technique is that it's a change of pace from the hearty roasted and sautéed vegetables of late winter and early spring. Now that the weather's getting warmer, I want something with a fresher, lighter feel. But I still want a lot of flavor, and I get it by adding bright seasonings like lemon zest, fresh ginger, and

herbs like chives and mint—flavors that are appropriate additions to quickly cooked food, since they tend to lose their intensity with longer cooking.

This method is also a great way to introduce yourself to vegetables that you might not be familiar with. I'm crazy about fresh

fava beans, and I find that parboiling them before further cooking is a must: It makes peeling their outer skin a breeze. You'll love the slightly sweet, slightly bitter flavor of fresh favas, though you do have to pop and peel a lot of beans before you get much of a yield.

To appreciate the simplicity of this method and these flavors, I've used only one vegetable for each of the recipes. I've paired each vegetable with a dif-

Parboiling has gotten a bad rap. Done right, it delivers crisp-tender texture—and no sogginess.

ferent flavor combination: prosciutto and mint; lemon and cream; orange-mustard and pecans; ginger and sesame. While I think these particular flavors go well with the vegetables I've paired them with, you can easily substitute one vegetable for another. And you can design your own vegetable "medleys" by combining two or more vegetables. Peas and favas go well together. Sometimes I cut asparagus and green beans into small pieces to match the size of peas and favas. First I parboil all four separately, and then I sauté them all together with lemon and cream or brown butter and toasted nuts for a pretty and tasty side dish.

When the weather turns cold, you can certainly apply this technique to other green vegetables like broccoli and Brussels sprouts. (I don't recommend this method for vegetables with a high water content like zucchini and other squash. It's better to cook these completely in a sauté pan over very high heat.) Try broccoli with olive oil, garlic, and minced sundried tomatoes, or Brussels sprouts with brown butter, toasted walnuts, and a bit of lemon. You'll come up with your own favorite combinations. Just keep the flavors bright and you can't go wrong. *(Recipes follow)*

Second step: sauté for flavor



It only takes a minute or two to add flavor in the sauté pan. Ginger, garlic, hoisin, and sesame glaze the parboiled asparagus.

You've got dinner
after a flash in the pan.
Ginger-Sesame
Asparagus makes the
meal with sautéed
shrimp and rice with
toasted sesame seeds.

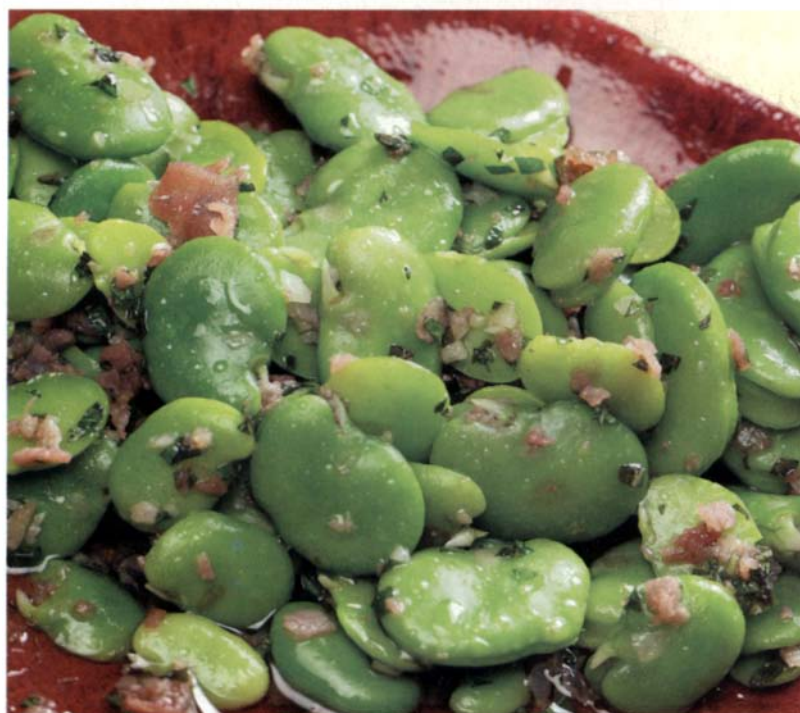


Ginger-Sesame Asparagus

You could use this flavor combination with green beans as well. Either way, cut the vegetable into small, angled pieces. Hoisin sauce, rice wine, and toasted sesame oil are all now available at most grocery stores. If you have access to an Asian grocery, however, buy your hoisin sauce there: It will be richer, thicker, and more intensely flavored. *Serves three as a side dish.*

- 2 Tbs. hoisin sauce**
- 1½ tsp. rice wine**
- 1 tsp. toasted sesame oil**
- 1 Tbs. peanut oil**
- 1 tsp. sesame seeds**
- 2 tsp. minced fresh ginger**
- 1 tsp. minced garlic (from about 1 large clove)**
- 1 bunch thin (or medium-thin) asparagus, bottom 2 inches trimmed (to yield about 8 oz.), stalks sliced at a very sharp angle into 2-inch pieces, parboiled (see the sidebar at right), and dried**
- ½ tsp. coarse salt**

Slip a fava bean out of its skin.
Pinch one end of the parboiled bean with a thumbnail, squeeze, and out pops the bean.



A classic flavor trio—salty ham, pungent garlic, and sweet mint—is the perfect pairing for the earthy flavor of fava beans.

In a small bowl, whisk together the hoisin sauce, rice wine, and sesame oil. In a large nonstick skillet, heat the peanut oil and sesame seeds over medium heat (put the seeds in the center of the pan, as some will pop to the sides as they cook). Let the oil and sesame seeds heat, without much stirring, until most of the seeds are browned, about 5 min. Add the ginger and garlic and stir-fry for 30 to 60 seconds. Add the hoisin mixture and stir to combine (I use a small heatproof spatula). Turn the heat to medium high, add the asparagus, sprinkle the salt over it, and mix to thoroughly coat the asparagus. Stir frequently and continue cooking until the asparagus is well coated and heated through, 1 min. The sauce should have a slightly glazy consistency. Serve immediately.

Fava Beans with Prosciutto, Mint & Garlic

Fava beans have two protective layers: a pod with a soft, furry lining and a tough skin around each bean. Popping the beans out of the pod is easy. Parboiling the beans will loosen the skin around the bean just enough for you to pinch it off (see the photo at left). A pound and a half of fava bean pods will only yield a scant cup of beans, so this recipe is designed to serve two people. If you want to double the recipe, you can use a cup of shelled fresh peas in place of the extra cup of favas if you like, since peas pair well with these flavors, too. *Serves two as a side dish.*

- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 Tbs. minced prosciutto (I use domestic)**
- 1 tsp. minced garlic**
- 1½ lb. fresh fava beans in the pod, shelled, parboiled (see the sidebar at right), and peeled to yield 1 scant cup of favas (see above)**
- ½ tsp. coarse salt; more to taste**
- ½ tsp. balsamic vinegar**
- 8 large mint leaves, finely chopped (to yield 2 to 3 tsp.)**

In a medium skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the prosciutto and sauté for 1 min. Add the garlic and sauté, stirring constantly, until it's very fragrant and just beginning to turn brown, another 1 to 2 min. Add the fava beans, season with the salt, and sauté until the favas are heated and coated well with the pan contents, another 2 min. (Some of the beans will begin to turn a lighter color.) Add the balsamic, turn off the heat, and stir to coat. Add the mint and stir to combine and wilt it. Taste for salt; depending on the saltiness of your prosciutto, you might want to add more.

Fresh Peas with Lemon & Chives

Fresh mint or chervil would be nice with these peas, too, if you don't have chives. If you don't have shallots, finely chop the white part of two small scallions. *Serves three as a side dish.*

- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 1 large shallot, finely chopped (to yield about 3 Tbs.)**

¼ cup heavy cream
2 tsp. finely chopped chives
¼ tsp. minced lemon zest
¼ tsp. coarse salt
Freshly ground black pepper
8 oz. shelled fresh peas, parboiled (see the sidebar below) and well drained

In a medium saucepan, melt the butter over low heat. Add the chopped shallot and sauté until softened, about 2 to 3 min. (Raise the heat to medium low if necessary, but don't let the shallot brown.) Add the heavy cream, chives, lemon zest, salt, and a few grinds of pepper. Bring the mixture to a boil. Boil for 30 seconds, add the peas, and cook until the cream has thickened enough to start clinging to the peas (a wooden spoon will leave a wide path when scraped on the bottom of the pan) and the peas are well heated, another 1 to 2 min. Remove the pan from the heat and taste for seasoning. Add more salt and pepper if you like and serve immediately.

Orange-Pecan Green Beans

Serve these savory beans with pork chops or roasted chicken. For variety, substitute yellow beans for half of the green beans. *Serves three as a side dish.*

2 Tbs. fresh orange juice (from about ½ small orange)
1 Tbs. Dijon mustard
1 tsp. light brown sugar
2 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 small red onion (4 oz.), very thinly sliced
⅓ cup coarsely chopped pecans
8 oz. fresh green beans, trimmed, cut in half (crosswise, not lengthwise), parboiled (see the sidebar below), and dried
½ to ¾ tsp. coarse salt
Freshly ground black pepper
½ tsp. lightly chopped fresh thyme



Perfectly cooked green beans are even tastier with sautéed red onions, pecans, and an orange-mustard glaze.

In a small bowl, whisk together the orange juice, mustard, and brown sugar. In a large nonstick skillet, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the red onion and pecans and toss to coat. Turn the heat to medium high and sauté, stirring often, until the onions are very shrunken and many are browned (the pecans will be golden), 8 to 10 min. Add the beans in one layer over the contents of the pan and season with salt, a few grinds of pepper, and the thyme. Add the mustard mixture, immediately turn the heat to medium low (the sauce will begin to thicken), and stir vigorously (or use tongs) to toss and combine the beans with the sauce. Continue cooking to heat the beans through and to thoroughly coat them, 1 to 2 min.

Susie Middleton is the executive editor of Fine Cooking. ♦

Parboil green veggies until crisp-tender

To parboil vegetables, you'll need just four basic kitchen tools: a medium-large pot (like a Dutch oven or soup pot, 4-quart capacity is fine), a large work bowl, a mesh strainer, and a clean dishtowel or two. Fill the pot with 2 quarts water and 1 tablespoon coarse salt and bring it to a boil. Fill the work bowl mostly with ice and cover with cold water. Dump your prepped vegetables into the boiling water and begin timing as soon as the vegetables are in the water; don't wait for it to

return to a boil. And don't go anywhere—use your mesh strainer to transfer the veggies to the ice bath just as soon as the time's up. Let the

vegetables sit for a minute or two in the ice water to stop the cooking and cool down. Lift the vegetables (use your hands or the strainer again) out of the ice bath and let them drain well in one layer on a dishtowel (or paper towels). Store them in a shallow container (lined with paper towels to absorb any excess moisture), covered with a slightly damp paper towel or dishtowel. They'll keep in the refrigerator overnight. If you plan to use them right away, make sure they're very dry.

PARBOILING TIMES

asparagus pieces, 1 minute

green beans, 4 to 5 minutes

fava beans, 2 minutes (small favas); 3 minutes (older, larger favas)

fresh peas, 2 minutes (small peas); 3 minutes (older, larger peas)

A Do-Ahead Mix for Quick & Easy Baking

A single homemade mix lets you make delicious scones, biscuits, and shortcakes at a moment's notice

BY KATHLEEN STEWART

Sandwich fresh fruit between a split shortcake for a quick but irresistible dessert.

Years ago in New Zealand, I attended a proper tea and had scones with clotted cream and strawberry jam. The scones were light and tender with a crisp exterior, more like perfect biscuits than the doughy concoctions that passed for scones back home. When I got back, I set out to recreate those scones at my bakery. In the development process, I not only came up with a delicious scone recipe, but something better as well: a wonderful make-ahead baking mix that can be used for all kinds of yummy things. At the bakery, we use the mix for scones, of course, but by playing with what we add to the mix—buttermilk or cream; more or less salt or sugar; fruits, nuts, herbs, or cheese—we also use it to make savory biscuits, shortcakes to use with fresh fruit, and cobbler toppings.

The mix, which consists of flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt with butter cut in, can easily be made in single, double, even triple batches; at my bakery, we go as high as twelve times the recipe. It keeps in the refrigerator for up to a week and in the freezer practically indefinitely (divide the dough into single-recipe portions before freezing). When you're ready to make your scones, biscuits, shortcakes, or cobblers, you only need to add the liquid ingredients. Just allow the frozen mix to warm until the butter is pliable, which takes only five minutes.

Handle the dough lightly

For tender, flaky results, you want to add a minimum amount of liquid—just enough to moisten the dry



Tailor the cobbler topping to suit your filling.

Here, almonds have been added to accompany fresh peaches.



What's not to love about blueberry scones in summer? When the seasons change, switch to dried fruit for equally delicious results.



Weeknight biscuits in no time. With a little added cheese and fresh thyme, the baking mix yields quick and delicious biscuits.

ingredients and hold them together—and handle the dough as little as possible after adding the liquid. Too much liquid is why so many scones taste doughy. If you feel like you need to incorporate more liquid, add just a little at a time.

I mix the wet and dry ingredients with a fork until they just hold together, and then turn the dough out onto a floured surface and fold it like a business letter a couple of times (see the photos on p. 51). This technique creates layers that bake into that perfect biscuit texture. My technique is similar to making a rough puff pastry, which is itself a shortcut for puff pastry. But unlike rough puff, which gets folded until it's smooth, I give this dough just a couple of folds, stopping while the dough is still a bit

lumpy and bumpy. The dough is then patted—not rolled—into whatever shape you need.

By now you've figured out that even though this mix gives you a big head start, the counter still gets a little messy. And that may make you wonder: "Is this mix really all that convenient?" Imagine that the day you come home with the season's first peaches, you're able to simply reach into the freezer to grab your mix, which thaws in the time it takes to slice the peaches. A few minutes later, with no sticks of butter to cut into small pieces, and hardly a dry ingredient or measure in sight, you have a cobbler baking in the oven. The answer is, then, yes, the mix is super convenient. But you won't believe me until you try it.



Combining dry ingredients and butter now means a big time savings later. You can cut in the butter with a food processor, a pastry cutter, or your fingers—as long as your hands aren't so warm that they melt the butter.

RECIPES

Multi-Purpose Baking Mix

You can make up to twelve times this recipe, but store each batch in a separate bag in the fridge (for up to a week) or in the freezer (for up to six months). Frozen mix should sit at room temperature until the butter is pliable, about 5 min. *Yields 21 oz. (about 4½ cups).*

13½ oz. (3 cups) all-purpose flour
1 Tbs. sugar
1 Tbs. baking powder
½ tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. salt
6 oz. (12 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut in small pieces

In a large bowl, stir the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Cut or massage the butter into the flour with a fork, a pastry cutter, or your fingers until the mixture looks like cornmeal and the biggest pieces of butter are the size of large peas. (You can also do this in a food processor; just be sure not to overmix.) Proceed with one of the recipes that follow, or refrigerate or freeze the mixture until ready to use.

Herbed Cheese Buttermilk Biscuits

If you want plain biscuits, just leave out the cheese and thyme. *Yields about a dozen 2½-inch biscuits.*

1 recipe Multi-Purpose Baking Mix (at left)
2 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
¾ cup grated cheese, such as Cheddar, Asiago, or Parmesan, or a mix
1 large egg
1¼ cups buttermilk; more if needed

Heat the oven to 375°F. In a bowl, combine the Baking Mix, the thyme, and ½ cup of the cheese. Break the egg into the buttermilk and stir briefly with a fork to combine. Make a shallow well in the dry mix and pour in the buttermilk. With as few strokes as possible, stir until the mixture is just combined. It should be loose, but if it doesn't hold together at all, add more buttermilk 1 Tbs. at a time.

Generously flour a counter and turn the dough out onto it; it will be shaggy and very soft. Scrape any bits in the bowl onto the mound of dough. Flour your hands. Shape the mixture into a very loose rectangle with the short side nearest you. Using a bench knife, a pastry scraper, or a spatula to help lift the ragged dough, fold the bottom third over the center third, and then the top third over the center, as if folding a business letter. Pat down to shape another rectangle, turn it so the short side is nearest you, and repeat the folding. Pat down again into more of a square shape, ¾ inch thick and about 8½ inches square. With a pastry brush, brush off any excess flour. Punch out the biscuits with a 2½-inch round cutter. Gather the scraps, press them together lightly, and punch out more biscuits until all the dough is used. Bake on an ungreased baking sheet (or one lined with parchment) for 15 min. Pull out the oven rack, quickly sprinkle the biscuits with the remaining cheese, and continue baking until lightly browned on top, about 10 min.

Blueberry Scones

In place of the blueberries, try ½ cup dried fruit, like currants or apricots, chopped if large, or 1 cup of your favorite berries or nuts. You could also replace the lemon zest with orange. *Yields 12 scones.*

1 recipe Multi-Purpose Baking Mix (at left)
1 Tbs. grated lemon zest
1 cup fresh blueberries, rinsed, picked over, and patted dry
1 large egg
1¼ cups buttermilk; more for brushing
3 Tbs. sugar; more for sprinkling

Heat the oven to 375°F. In a bowl, combine the Baking Mix with the zest and the blueberries. Break the egg into the buttermilk and stir with a fork; add the sugar and stir briefly to combine. Make a shallow well in the dry mix and pour in the wet ingredients. With as few strokes as possible, stir until the mixture is just combined. It should be loose, but if it doesn't hold together at all, add more buttermilk 1 Tbs. at a time.

Generously flour a counter and turn the dough out onto it; it will be shaggy and very soft. Scrape any bits in the bowl onto the mound of dough. Flour your hands. Shape the mixture into a very loose rectangle with the

short side nearest you. Using a bench knife, a pastry scraper, or a spatula to help lift the ragged dough, fold the bottom third over the center third, and then the top third over the center, as if you're folding a business letter. Pat down to shape another rectangle, turn it so the short side is nearest you, and repeat the folding. Divide the dough and shape each half into a round about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick. With a pastry brush, brush off the excess flour. With a sharp knife, cut the rounds into six wedges each. Brush the tops with buttermilk and sprinkle them with sugar. Bake on an ungreased baking sheet (or one lined with parchment) until golden brown, 25 to 30 min.

Shortcake Biscuits or Cobbler Topping

To make a filling for shortcakes, toss ripe berries or sliced fruit with some sugar or fresh lemon juice; for a cobbler, add a little flour as well to thicken the fruit juices as they bake. I like to flavor the topping to suit the fruit: a pinch of cinnamon and ginger into the dry mix for an apple cobbler; $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped nuts to the dry mix for a peach shortcake. Extracts and zests are another option: along with the cream, try adding 1 tsp. vanilla extract for strawberry shortcakes or $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. almond extract for an apricot or plum cobbler. *Yields enough dough to top a 9x13-inch cobbler or to make nine 3-inch shortcake biscuits.*

1 recipe Multi-Purpose Baking Mix (at left)

1 large egg

$1\frac{1}{4}$ cups heavy cream; more for brushing

1 Tbs. sugar; more for sprinkling

Heat the oven to 375°F. Put the Baking Mix in a bowl. Add the egg to the cream and stir with a fork to combine; add the sugar and stir. Make a shallow well in the dry mix and pour in the wet ingredients. With as few strokes as possible, stir until the mixture is just combined. It should be loose, but if it doesn't hold together at all, add more cream 1 Tbs. at a time.



For a quick cobbler, lay the dough over a fruit filling. Don't fret over any gaps or breaks in the dough.

Generously flour a counter and turn the dough out onto it; it will be shaggy and very soft. Scrape any bits in the bowl onto the mound of dough. Flour your hands. Shape the mixture into a very loose rectangle with the short side nearest you. Using a bench knife, a pastry scraper, or a spatula to help lift the ragged dough, fold the bottom third over the center third, and then the top third over the center, as if you're folding a business letter. Pat down to shape another rectangle, turn it so the short side is nearest you, and repeat the folding. Pat down again to about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch for a cobbler, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick for shortcakes.

For a cobbler—Lay the dough on top of fruit that's been tossed with some sugar and a bit of flour and spread in a 9x13-inch baking dish. It's fine if the topping breaks into pieces; just be sure most of the fruit is covered. Brush with cream and sprinkle with sugar. Bake until the topping is golden brown, 25 to 30 min.

For shortcakes—Cut the dough into the shapes you want—circles or squares—and set them on an ungreased baking sheet (or one lined with parchment). Brush with cream and sprinkle with sugar. Bake until the tops have started to brown and the bottoms are golden, 20 to 22 min. While the biscuits are still slightly warm, split them, fill with your favorite fruit filling, and top with whipped cream.

Kathleen Stewart runs the Downtown Bakery in Healdsburg, California. ♦

When you're ready to bake, stir in liquid, pat, and fold



Your choice of liquid is one of the few last-minute decisions you'll have to make. Try buttermilk for biscuits and scones, cream for cobblers and shortcakes.



A few quick folds prevents overmixing the dough. The resulting layers of butter make a lighter pastry.

Fill Your Soup Pot with

An easy formula guarantees a successful, flavor-packed soup—and still leaves room for creativity

BY PAM ANDERSON

During the summer cooking classes I teach, I've come to expect that at least one person each session will ask how to use up those bulging bags of zucchini, peppers, and tomatoes we've either grown, bought cheap, or been given. When I suggest zucchini bread, I get the been-there-done-that roll of the eyes. The students temporarily perk up when I promote a frittata or pasta sauce until they realize that neither dish calls for enough vegetables to make a dent in the excess.

Then I tell them about my summer soup idea, and they really get excited. My summer vegetable soup is not just a single recipe—it's a formula; all you need is a pound and a half of vegetables and a few pantry staples. Regardless of which particular vegetables you want to use up, you can make a soup that's substantial enough for a meal, yet light enough for warm summer weather. The flavors are fresh and inviting, and the soups come together in no time at all.

Once you know the soup formula, you can make exceptions

The formula for making a summer soup is simple—1 onion, 1 cup diced tomatoes, 1 quart chicken broth, 1½ pounds vegetables, ½ pound meat (or 2 pounds vegetables and no meat), a starch such as potatoes, rice, or canned beans (see the chart on p. 55 for amounts), and fresh herbs or dried spices for extra flavor. When the weather cools down, I make the formula slightly heartier by using 1 pound meat to 1 pound vegetables.

How do you determine which vegetables and meat to toss into the soup kettle? I start by calling on



Pam Anderson's advice: "Prep as you go." Put the soup pot on and add vegetables as you cut them.

the summer vegetables begging for attention: the zucchini a neighbor gave me from his garden; the couple of leftover ears of corn from the half-dozen I bought yesterday. But I also look for the loners—that pair of shy leeks sitting in the vegetable drawer or the lonely cabbage quarter on the bottom shelf.

To keep cooking time short (and flavors light), I avoid long-simmering meats like whole chicken, beef shanks, or ham hocks. Instead, I buy cuts that cook quickly. I flavor my summer vegetable soups with boneless, skinless chicken thighs (they're more flavorful than chicken breasts), turkey cutlets, fully cooked poultry sausage, boneless ham, shrimp, crab, and mild fish fillets.

Are there vegetables that only go with certain meat, poultry, or fish? Though some combinations are more obvious than others (chicken with carrots and peas; crab with corn and bell peppers), I can't think of any combinations that really clash, so this is the perfect opportunity to get creative. These soups can also easily make an all-vegetable dinner. If you skip the meat, use 2 pounds vegetables as mentioned above,

Summer's Vegetables



A simple formula for a quick soup

1 onion

1 cup diced tomatoes

1 quart chicken broth

1½ pounds vegetables and

½ pound meat (or 2 pounds
vegetables and no meat)

A starch, like pasta or beans

Fresh herbs or dried spices

(For the method and ingredient
ideas, turn the page.)

Add shrimp to a summery trio of corn, peppers, and zucchini. Punch up the flavors with a squeeze of lemon.

and add plenty of herbs and a squeeze of lemon juice or other acidic ingredient when you season the soup.

Start by sautéing an onion, and add to the soup pot as you prep

The technique for making these soups is simple. I sauté a chopped onion until softened, add the remaining ingredients, bring to a simmer, and cook until the vegetables get tender, about twenty minutes. There are, of course, a few exceptions (some ingredients are best added in the last few minutes). But it's easier to know a formula and remember the exceptions than not to know a formula at all.

Making one of these soups is the one time you don't need to have all your ingredients prepped before starting to cook. To save time, I get the onion going in the oil while I gather and start cutting up the vegetables I want to use. If I'm not finished preparing the vegetables by the time the onion has softened, I simply add the chicken broth to stop the sautéing and get a head start on simmering.

Besides the onion and tomato, which I always include in the soup, I usually select three vegetables to make up the 1½ pounds. To measure them, I pull out my scale and keep adding until I reach the approximate weight. Don't worry if you don't have a scale; you can easily approximate. For instance, one medium bell pepper is about ½ pound; so is one medium-large zucchini (see below for more equivalents). But after you make a few of these soups, you'll find you hardly need to measure at all.

One thing to keep in mind when you *are* using a scale: Vegetables that need minimal trimming such as carrots, celery, and zucchini can go directly onto the scale. Vegetables such as leeks, corn, and peppers should be trimmed and cut before going on the scale, since their gross and trimmed weights vary so much.

I usually add the half-pound of meat, poultry, or seafood to the soup kettle at the same time as the vegetables. To give the soup a homemade feel, I usually cut boneless ham into slices and then shred

Summer vegetable soup, step by step (serves four)

In a 3- or 4-quart Dutch oven or soup pot:

1. Sauté

until softened:
1 medium-large onion, chopped, in 2 Tbs. olive oil or vegetable oil

2. Add

optional seasoning:
♦ garlic or ginger, minced
♦ dried herbs or spices

3. Add

1 qt. chicken broth

4. Add

1 cup diced tomato, fresh or drained canned

5. Add 1½ lb. vegetables. Choose three and use ½ lb. of each:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| ♦ bell peppers (about 1 large), diced | ♦ escarole (about ½ medium head), coarsely chopped | ♦ sugar snap peas, cut into ½-inch pieces (about 2 cups) |
| ♦ cabbage (about ¼ small head), coarsely chopped | ♦ fennel (about ½ large bulb), chopped | ♦ Swiss chard (leaves from 1 large bunch), coarsely chopped (about 5 cups) |
| ♦ carrots (about 2 medium), cut into ¼-inch coins | ♦ green beans (about 1¾ cups), cut into 1-inch pieces | ♦ zucchini or summer squash (about 1 medium-large), quartered lengthwise and cut crosswise into ½-inch pieces |
| ♦ celery (about 4 ribs), sliced ¼ inch thick | ♦ leeks (2 medium), sliced (white and light-green parts only) | |
| ♦ corn, kernels cut from 2 cobs (about 1½ cups kernels) | ♦ lima beans, shelled (about 1¾ cups) | |
| ♦ curly endive (about 1 small head), coarsely chopped | ♦ okra, cut into ½-inch coins (about 2 cups) | |

Hold these quick-cooking vegetables to add for the last 5 min. of cooking (see step 8):

- ♦ peas, shelled if fresh (about 2 cups)
- ♦ spinach (one 10-oz. bag), stemmed and coarsely chopped



For variety, use three different vegetables in a soup. A half pound of each (along with onions, tomatoes, and a starch) makes a hearty soup.



Toss almost everything into the pot at once, but hold back the shrimp. Add them in the last five minutes of simmering so they don't overcook.

6. Add ½ lb. meat, poultry, or fish.
Choose one from the list below:

- ♦ **boneless, skinless chicken thighs**, left whole (remove after 15 min., shred, and return to the pot)
- ♦ **turkey cutlets**, left whole (remove after 15 min., shred, and return to the pot)
- ♦ **ham**, shredded or cut into bite-size pieces
- ♦ **boneless fish filets**, such as cod, snapper, grouper, tilapia, catfish, or salmon, left whole
- ♦ **fresh or pasteurized crabmeat**, picked over and shells discarded

Hold these quick-cooking shellfish to add for the last 5 min. of cooking (see step 8):

- ♦ **shrimp**, peeled and cut crosswise into ½-inch pieces if large; left whole if small
- ♦ **bay scallops or sea scallops**, cut in half if large

7. Add a starch.
Choose one from the list below:

- ♦ **raw new potatoes**, 1 lb., cut into medium dice
- ♦ **raw long-grain white or basmati rice**, ⅓ cup
- ♦ **raw orzo pasta**, ⅓ cup
- ♦ **raw egg noodles**, 2 cups
- ♦ **white beans, chick-peas, or hominy**, two 15½- or 16-oz. cans or one 29-oz. can, drained and rinsed

8. Simmer for 20 min.

Add any quick-cooking vegetables or shellfish to the pot for the last 5 min. of the simmer.

9. Rest for 5 min. and add either or both:

- ♦ **2 Tbs. minced fresh herbs**, such as basil, parsley, cilantro, mint, or tarragon
- ♦ **1 or 2 tsp. acid**, such as lemon juice, vinegar, or hot red pepper sauce; or try Worcestershire sauce or soy sauce

10. Taste and adjust seasonings with salt and pepper.

the slices by hand into bite-size pieces. I slice poultry sausage into rounds. Before tossing crabmeat into the pot, I always pick through it for shells.

I also like shredded chicken and turkey, as well as flaked fish. To achieve this look, I add the whole boneless chicken thighs, turkey cutlets, or fish fillets to the kettle with the vegetables. With a couple of stirs during cooking, the fish usually flakes right in the pot. But for the turkey and chicken, I pull them from the kettle when they're just cooked, cut or shred them into bite-size pieces, and then return them to the simmering soup. Shrimp is one exception. Since it cooks so quickly, I add it to the soup during the last few minutes of cooking.

Obviously the broth for this quick soup is store-bought, not homemade. It lacks the body of from-scratch stock, but it's flavorful and convenient. Instead of the canned brands, I've come to like the flavor of Swanson's chicken broth in the 1-quart carton. I haven't experimented enough with store-bought vegetable broth to recommend one, but if you're interested in making a vegetarian soup, just be sure to taste your broth before using it and add extra seasonings like herbs, ginger, or garlic to get the fullest flavor you can.

These soups simmer for just twenty minutes, so there's not much time to develop long-cooked

flavor. For a touch of brightness, the acidity in tomatoes is key. Like the onion, a small quantity of tomatoes—canned or fresh—adds a subtle flavor dimension the soup often needs. I also find that while you could skip the starch and make an all-vegetable soup, the rice, potatoes, beans, or pasta really gives the soup body and staying power. No matter which starch you use, add it along with the other ingredients once the onion is sautéed.

Herbs and spices dramatically boost the flavor of these soups. I add dried herbs and spices at the beginning with the vegetables, starch, and meat, but I wait until the end to stir in fresh herbs. Not only do fresh herbs like parsley, cilantro, and basil perk up the flavor, they also brighten the soup's look. And don't forget about acidic ingredients: Hot red pepper sauce, vinegar, or lemon juice (or even soy sauce or Worcestershire) always brighten flavors in a soup pot. Give the soup a few minutes to rest so that the flavors have time to marry. Finally, wait until the end to taste and season the soup with salt and pepper.

Once you understand the formula, you can start making exceptions. If, for example, you want to spice up the soup, feel free to add a clove or two of garlic or minced jalapeño to the sautéing onion. If you want to sauté some of the vegetables, like celery or bell peppers, go ahead and do that along with the onion. If the soup is too thick for you, no problem: Just thin it with a little more chicken broth.

Once you've made a few of these soups, you'll forget that you ever needed a recipe.

Pam Anderson is the author of The Perfect Recipe and How to Cook Without a Book. ♦

Summer soup inspiration

Use these ideas as a springboard for making your own trademark summer soup.

Shrimp Soup with Spinach, Okra & Hominy

Use bell peppers, spinach, okra, shrimp, canned hominy, lemon juice, and fresh parsley.

Curried Vegetable Soup with Turkey & Chickpeas

Use curry powder, leeks, zucchini, carrots, canned chickpeas, turkey cutlets, and fresh parsley or cilantro.

Gingery Summer All-Vegetable Soup

Use fresh ginger, leeks, Savoy cabbage, corn, zucchini, new potatoes, fresh mint, and fresh parsley.

Chicken Noodle Soup with Summer Vegetables

Use green beans, carrots, corn, boneless chicken thighs, egg noodles, and fresh thyme.

Crab & Corn Soup with Peppers & Rice

Use Old Bay seasoning, bell peppers,

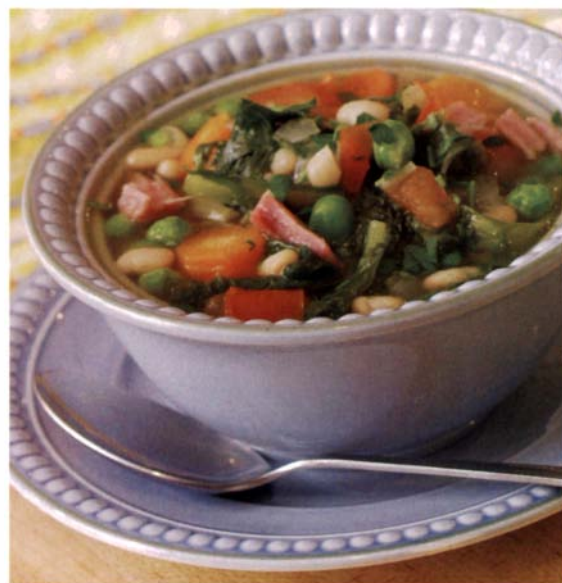
lima beans, corn, crabmeat, long-grain rice, and fresh basil or parsley.

Ham & White Bean Soup with Zucchini & Basil

Use celery, cabbage, zucchini, tomatoes, shredded ham, canned white beans, and fresh basil.

Minty "Peas & Beans" Summer Soup

Use fresh peas, sugar snap peas, green or yellow beans, lima beans, canned white or cranberry beans, and fresh mint.



Get creative. We started with fresh peas, carrots, and escarole, and added ham, white beans, and a little fresh tarragon for a smoky-sweet combo.

Savory Stuffed Chicken Breasts

Put a bit of stuffing under the skin to enhance flavor and to keep the meat from drying out

BY MARTHA HOLMBERG

Let me begin by saying that I've never much liked chicken breasts. Seems to me that their main virtues—quick-cooking, mild flavor—can be as much negatives as positives. Quick-cooking often translates into dry, and mild flavor is just a nice way of saying bland. When it's been up to me to pick the part of the chicken I want to cook, I've usually chosen the thigh.

I am outnumbered, however, by the other two members of my household, who both love chicken breasts. And I have to admit that I'm now glad of that fact because I recently developed a way to cook chicken breasts that I truly love, too—it's easy and quick, but the results are moist and very flavorful.

My method is to make a super-savory stuffing and slide it under the skin. Then I sear the chicken on both sides and finish cooking it in a hot oven. The whole process takes about ten minutes longer



Crisp skin and vibrant seasonings make chicken breasts succulent.

than sautéing or broiling a plain chicken breast, but the results are a whole magnitude of deliciousness better.

A good stuffing will baste as it adds flavor

The stuffing can be made of a variety of ingredients, as long as they're quite assertive and can be mashed into a rough paste, which is the consistency you need in order to slide the stuffing under the skin. Too wet and you'll have a sloppy mess; too dry and the stuffing will crumble as you try to insert it.



A stovetop-to-oven method keeps the chicken moist, according to Martha Holmberg, so choose an ovenproof skillet.

All my stuffings contain some cheese, which helps bind the ingredients, as well as a touch of butter, which not only binds but also bastes the chicken as it cooks. In fact, most of the butter ends up melting out of the stuffing into the pan by the end of cooking, but it does a good job of adding flavor and moisture along the way.

I've developed three different stuffings, each with a different feeling, all very quick to make. The first combination has a slightly Italian feel to it, with prosciutto, Parmesan, sun-dried tomatoes, and sage. The second is just grated Parmesan, chopped herbs, fresh bread-crumbs, and a touch of grainy mustard to give it some punch. I've got another that can only be described as "zesty" (as much as I hate that word): roasted red pepper (from a jar is fine), feta, black olives, mint, and a touch of orange zest—very refreshing.

You can make a double or triple batch of any of these stuffings, freeze them in small zip-top bags, and then pull them out at the last minute for a quick dinner—the small amount of filling will thaw in a few minutes by soaking the bag in cold water.

The skin crisps and protects; the bones just get in the way

The only not completely easy thing about these recipes is buying boneless chicken breasts with the skin still on. In my market, I can get skinless, boneless or skin-on, bone-in. I tried making these dishes with bone-in chicken, but the boniness makes it hard to sauté evenly and doesn't look particularly nice on the plate.

In most grocery stores, you can just ask the butcher to take out the bones for you. If that's not possible (or if you like learning to bone things, as I do), buy the bone-in breast and take the couple of extra minutes necessary to learn to cut out the bones on your own. Once you've done this a few times, you'll find it's quite easy (see Basics, p. 80, for instructions).



Create a space, not a flap. Try to keep the edges of the skin attached to the meat.

Be vigilant about preserving the skin. Pick breasts that still have a lot of skin intact, without visible holes or tears, and if you have the butcher bone the breasts, be sure to ask him or her to be gentle with the skin. Often in the package, the skin will look a bit wrinkled or scrunched off center, but you can usually smooth it into place without a problem.

The skin is attached to the breast by a very thin, transparent—but remarkably strong—membrane. When you make the pocket for the stuffing, you want to try to preserve this membrane; otherwise, you'll end up with a flap of skin that's suddenly independent of the meat—not much good for holding in a stuffing. But if things do get disconnected, don't despair. Just position the skin on the stuffing as best you can and carry on. There may be a little shifting during cooking, so just be careful when you turn the chicken.

To make the space for the stuffing, start by smoothing the skin over the surface of the breast. Pick a spot along the perimeter of the skin, slide in your index finger, and move it back and forth like a windshield wiper, so that you don't make the hole at the perimeter bigger but you clear a space inside. When you've



Smooth the stuffing from the outside.
Gentle prodding will help distribute the layer.



No flipping until you see the golden crust. Let the chicken sauté undisturbed to avoid tearing the skin.

reached as far as you can from that position, find another spot and repeat the process, remembering that you want to keep the skin attached around the perimeter as much as possible.

Start stuffing by taking a fingerful and pushing it into one of the spaces; continue to work it deeper into the space by coaxing it into place from the outside. Once the full portion of stuffing is under the skin, just pat, poke, and smooth the skin until the stuffing is in a fairly even layer and the skin is spread taut.

I find it works best if I freeze the stuffed breasts for five to ten minutes before I start cooking to firm up the stuffing so it doesn't immediately melt out of the chicken in the frying pan.

Sear-roasting browns the surface but keeps the meat tender

For this sear-roasting method, which I think gives moister results than a straight stovetop sauté, you'll need a heavy-based skillet that has an ovenproof handle and comfortably holds the number of breasts you want to cook. Too tight a squeeze will make you curse when you try to flip the chicken. When I do two or three breasts, my nine-inch cast-iron skillet

works brilliantly. For a larger batch, use two skillets—just be sure you can fit them in your oven at the same time.

As with all sautéing, get the skillet really hot, add the oil and butter (I use a little butter to get the best coloring on the skin), and then add the chicken, skin side down. Don't move the chicken one millimeter for at least a minute or you'll risk tearing the skin. During this initial hands-off period, a crust forms that makes it safe and easy to reposition the chicken and ultimately to flip it. I cook the breasts for four minutes on the first

side to get a golden surface, and then I flip them and finish cooking them in a hot oven—450°F. They cook in about ten minutes, after which they benefit from another three to five minutes of rest, so the protein fibers in the chicken relax, the juices redistribute, and the whole thing develops better flavor and texture.

This little rest, best taken under a tent of aluminum foil, gives me the time to deglaze the pan with a little white wine or lemon juice and chicken stock—canned is fine—which makes a few savory spoonfuls of sauce (see below). *(Recipes follow)*

A three-minute sauce captures the flavors from the pan

If you want to make a little unthickened pan sauce from the drippings, transfer the chicken to a warm spot and pour off any grease from the pan. Put the pan back on

the stove over high heat and add ½ cup white wine and ¼ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock. Boil until the liquid has reduced to about 2 tablespoons,

scraping with a wooden spoon to dissolve all the browned bits. Pour this sauce around the chicken (not on top of the crispy skin) and serve immediately.



Take your time when turning. To preserve the skin and stuffing, go easy when flipping.

It's easy to bone a chicken breast

If the butcher hasn't done it for you, you can easily remove the bones from a chicken breast yourself. Follow our instructions in the Basics department on p. 80.



RECIPES

Chicken Breasts Stuffed with Prosciutto, Parmesan & Sun-Dried Tomatoes

I think the "packed in oil" sun-dried tomatoes have a nice texture and flavor, but if you can't find them, just use the plain dried kind and rehydrate them well before use. *Serves two.*

- 3 Tbs. freshly grated Parmesan, preferably *parmigiano reggiano***
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped prosciutto (about 1 medium slice; domestic is fine)**
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped, well-drained sun-dried tomatoes**
- 1 tsp. finely chopped fresh sage or ¼ tsp. dried sage**
- 1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. unsalted butter, softened**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 boneless chicken breast halves, skin on (see Basics, p. 80, for removing bones, if necessary)**
- 1 Tbs. oil**

Heat the oven to 450°F. In a small bowl, combine the Parmesan, prosciutto, sun-

dried tomatoes, sage, and 1 Tbs. of the butter and mix until well blended. Taste and season with pepper and possibly more salt, though the prosciutto and cheese contribute salt. The mixture should be highly seasoned.

Gently slide your index finger under the skin to create a small pocket. Scoop up some of the filling and push it into the pocket, spreading it as evenly as possible. Do this in a few places until you've used half the filling and covered the top of the breast, but be careful not to completely detach the skin from the meat. Tidy up the skin by stretching it over the filling and the breast as evenly as possible. Repeat with the second breast. Chill in the freezer for about 5 min. to let the filling firm up.

Remove the chicken from the freezer, and season both sides with salt and pepper. Heat a cast-iron or other heavy-based ovenproof skillet on the stove over medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, add the oil and the last 1 tsp. butter. When the butter stops foaming, add the chicken breasts, skin side down. Don't try to move them for at least 1 min. or the skin might tear. After 1 min. or so, you can move them around to be sure they're not sticking. Cook until the skin side is well browned, about 4 min.

Carefully slide a thin spatula under the chicken and flip it over, taking care not to rip the skin. Put the pan in the hot oven and continue cooking until the chicken is no longer pink inside, about 10 min. or until a thermometer reads 165°F at the thickest part. Take the breasts from the oven, let them rest for 3 to 5 min. tented with foil, and then serve immediately.



Chicken Breasts with Parmesan-Herb Stuffing

Most butchers will bone the breast for you, but be sure to ask them to be gentle with the skin. If you only have one kind of herb instead of two, just use a double amount. *Serves two.*

- ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan, preferably *parmigiano reggiano***
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh tarragon or basil**
- 2 Tbs. fresh breadcrumbs (English muffins make great crumbs)**
- 1½ tsp. grainy mustard**
- 2 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. unsalted butter, softened**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 boneless chicken breast halves, skin on (see Basics, p. 80, for removing bones, if necessary)**
- 1 Tbs. oil**

Heat the oven to 450°F. In a small bowl, mix the Parmesan, parsley, tarragon, breadcrumbs, mustard, and 2 Tbs. of the butter until blended. Taste and season with salt and pepper—the mixture should be highly seasoned.

Gently slide your index finger under the skin to create a small pocket. Scoop up



some of the filling and push it into the pocket, spreading it as evenly as possible. Do this in a few places until you've used half the filling and covered the top of the breast, but be careful not to completely detach the skin from the meat. Tidy up the skin by stretching it over the filling and the breast as evenly as possible. Repeat with the second breast. Chill in the freezer for about 5 min. to let the filling firm up.

Remove the chicken from the freezer and season both sides with salt and pepper. Heat a cast-iron or other heavy-based ovenproof skillet on the stove over medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, add the oil and the last 1 tsp. butter. When the butter stops foaming, add the chicken breasts, skin side down. Don't try to move them for at least 1 min. or the skin might tear. After 1 min. or so, you can move them around to be sure they're not sticking. Cook until the skin side is well browned, about 4 min.

Carefully slide a thin spatula under the chicken and flip it over, taking care not to rip the skin. Put the pan in the hot oven and continue cooking until the chicken is no longer pink inside, about 10 min. or until a thermometer reads 165°F at the thickest part. Take the breasts from the oven, let them rest for 3 to 5 min. tented with foil, and then serve immediately.

Chicken Breasts Stuffed with Red Pepper, Olives & Feta

If you don't have the time to roast fresh red peppers, use some from a jar or can, but rinse and dry them first. *Serves two.*

2 Tbs. chopped roasted red pepper
2 Tbs. chopped good-quality black olives
 (I like kalamatas)

About 1 oz. feta, mashed with a fork
1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
½ tsp. grated orange zest

1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. unsalted butter,
softened

Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 boneless chicken breast halves, skin on
 (see Basics, p. 80, for removing bones, if necessary)

1 Tbs. oil

Heat the oven to 450°F. In a small bowl, combine the red pepper, olives, feta, parsley, thyme, orange zest, and 1 Tbs. of the butter; mix until well blended. Taste and season with pepper and possibly salt, though the olives and feta contribute salt. The mixture should be highly seasoned.

Gently slide your index finger under the skin to create a small pocket. Scoop up some of the filling and push it into the pocket, spreading it as evenly as possible. Do this in a few places until you've used

half the filling and covered the top of the breast, but be careful not to completely detach the skin from the meat. Tidy up the skin by stretching it over the filling and the breast as evenly as possible. Repeat with the second breast. Chill in the freezer for about 5 min. to let the filling firm up.

Remove the chicken from the freezer and season both sides with salt and pepper. Heat a cast-iron or other heavy-based ovenproof skillet on the stove over medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, add the oil and the last 1 tsp. of butter. When the butter stops foaming, add the chicken breasts, skin side down. Don't try to move them for at least 1 min. or the skin might tear. After 1 min. or so, you can move them around to be sure they're not sticking. Cook until the skin side is well browned, about 4 min.

Carefully slide a thin spatula under the chicken and flip it over, taking care not to rip the skin. Put the pan in the hot oven and continue cooking until the chicken is no longer pink inside, about 10 min. or until a thermometer reads 165°F at the thickest part. Take the breasts from the oven, let them rest for 3 to 5 min. tented with foil, and then serve immediately.

Martha Holmberg is the editor-in-chief of Fine Cooking. ♦



For weeknights, easy-drinking reds that won't break the bank

"Weeknight wines"—easy-drinking wines for everyday enjoyment—come in a broad range of often-amazing values. For these Mediterranean chicken dishes, look to fruity reds with medium tannins, and then fine-tune your choices to suit each dish. All the wines here are under \$10, and all are easy to find.

Few wines complement herbs like a medium-bodied

California Zinfandel. For the Chicken with Parmesan Herb Stuffing, try Fetzer's 1998 Home Ranch Zinfandel (\$9); its bright fruit would heighten both the chicken's sweetness and the Parmesan's salty richness. Antinori's Santa Cristina Sangiovese di Toscana would also be good (\$9 and a lot like a young Chianti).

The earthy-salty flavors of the Chicken with Red Pepper,

Olives & Feta need a medium-bodied red with full fruit and medium tannins. Paul Jaboulet-Aîné's "Parallèle 45" (\$9) from the Rhône Valley would suit me just fine, as would Pepperwood Grove's 1999 California Syrah (\$7).

The Chicken with Prosciutto, Parmesan & Sun-Dried Tomatoes also has salty flavors, as well as tangy ones. Again, fruity and medium-

bodied is the way to go. From Chile, I like the 1999 Valle Central "Sunrise" Merlot (\$7), which has the racy acidity that Merlot often lacks, as well as Rosemount's South Eastern Australia Grenache-Shiraz (\$8), a tasty blend with ripe, red fruit flavors.

Steven Kolpan is a professor of wine studies at the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park, New York.



The briefest dunk is all you need. You want the leaves to become limp but not cooked—just a few seconds in the hot water.



A shock in ice water stops the cooking and keeps the color. This blanching step makes the pesto super-creamy and helps it stay emulsified.

The Trick to Smooth, Creamy Pesto

Blanch the basil first to keep its bright color and to create a better emulsion

BY ROBERT DANHI

When I pull tender leaves of basil from their stems, I can't resist closing my eyes and taking a deep breath; the fragrance is pure summer. One of my favorite ways to showcase the herb is to make a traditional Genovese pesto sauce, a purée of lots and lots of basil with garlic, pine nuts, cheese, and olive oil. Not only is this potent sauce versatile—equally at home on pasta, in an omelet, and paired with chicken (see p. 65)—but because I can freeze it, I can make pesto when basil is at its best and then continue to enjoy it through the fall.

A blanching and a blender give you the best results

Most cooks agree about the ingredients that go into traditional pesto. What we don't often agree on is



Chopping the basil speeds blending. Squeeze out the excess water first.

Photos except where noted: Joanne Smart. Photo at far right: Scott Phillips.

the best way to combine these ingredients. As its name implies, pesto is traditionally made using a mortar and pestle. Although some swear that pounding gives you the best flavor, I've never noticed a difference that's worth the effort. Others prefer to use a food processor, but while this machine certainly speeds up the process, the ingredients tend to bounce around and fly onto the sides of the bowl, resulting in an inconsistent texture. I prefer to use a blender. Because of the blender's tapered shape, the ingredients are drawn to the blade, where they get puréed more evenly. I've noticed with some blender models, however, that you'll have to help the puréeing along by periodically stopping the motor and moving the ingredients around with a spatula or a spoon.

A quick blanch before blending softens the basil, creating a more supple sauce. There are two reasons why I blanch my basil before puréeing it. One of them, admittedly, is purely cosmetic: a brighter green color that holds for several days. More important, however, is the texture. Blanched basil emulsifies more easily to produce a smoother yet full-bodied sauce. Blanching will slightly reduce the potency of the fresh basil flavor, but because a good bunch of basil starts out so incredibly fragrant, the reduction is minimal. Just be sure to dip the leaves only briefly in the boiling water and then quickly plunge them in ice water to keep them from overcooking (see the photos at left).

Start with the best basil, the freshest pine nuts, and good-quality cheese

Searching for the right sources for pesto ingredients is time well spent. Aside from your own garden, farmers' markets are a great source for fresh basil. But at this time of year, you can even find giant bouquets of sweet basil with bright, perky leaves at the supermarket, so don't settle for bunches that look droopy or have blackened leaves. Fresh basil doesn't last long (which is another reason I'm often whipping up a batch of pesto). To extend its life in the refrigerator, I usually wrap the basil in barely damp paper towels and then put it into a plastic bag.

Pine nuts thicken the pesto. These soft nuts purée really well to give the sauce more body. But because they spoil easily, smell and taste your pine nuts to be sure they're fresh before adding them to the pesto. (Storing them in the refrigerator extends their life.) Sweet, rich pine nuts are the standard in basil pesto, but you could substitute another mild-flavored nut, such as walnuts or almonds.

Choose extra-virgin olive oil for the best basil pesto. I prefer a mild, fruity oil rather than a peppery one since the sauce already gets some heat from black pepper and raw garlic. When I make pestos using other herbs, such as the cilantro-scallion pesto



on p. 64, I might choose a more neutral oil, such as canola or grapeseed. Whichever oil you use, smell and taste it for freshness as well.

Pesto freezes well, so go ahead and make a lot of it

Take advantage of this peak season for basil—you'll get the best quality at the best price—by preparing several batches of pesto. If you plan to use it within a week, all you need to do is refrigerate it in an airtight container. To extend your pesto's shelf life for up to three months, freeze it. If you have spare ice-cube trays (that you don't need to use for ice again), pour the pesto into the trays, freeze, and then put the cubes in a freezer bag for storage. You can also freeze small amounts of pesto in little plastic snack bags (and then stack those in a bigger freezer bag) for when you want enough for just one portion of pasta or for a dollop in a soup or stew. If you flatten the pesto in the bag, the thin amount can be quickly defrosted by soaking the bag in tepid water. (Recipes follow)

The time to make pesto is when basil is both beautiful and abundant.

Look for the best examples of the other ingredients, too: real *parmi-giano reggiano*, fruity olive oil, and fresh pine nuts.

Check for a coarse purée before adding the oil. You may need to stop and start your blender at first, as well as scrape down the sides.



RECIPES

Basil Pesto

This recipe is easily doubled. *Yields 1½ cups.*

- 1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. coarse salt**
- 3 cups packed basil leaves**
- ¼ cup ice water**
- 1 to 2 cloves garlic, smashed and peeled**
- ½ cup pine nuts**
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese, preferably *parmigiano reggiano***
- 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, preferably a fruity one**

Bring 2 qt. water seasoned with 1 Tbs. of the salt to a rolling boil. Meanwhile, set up an ice bath by combining ice and water in a medium bowl.

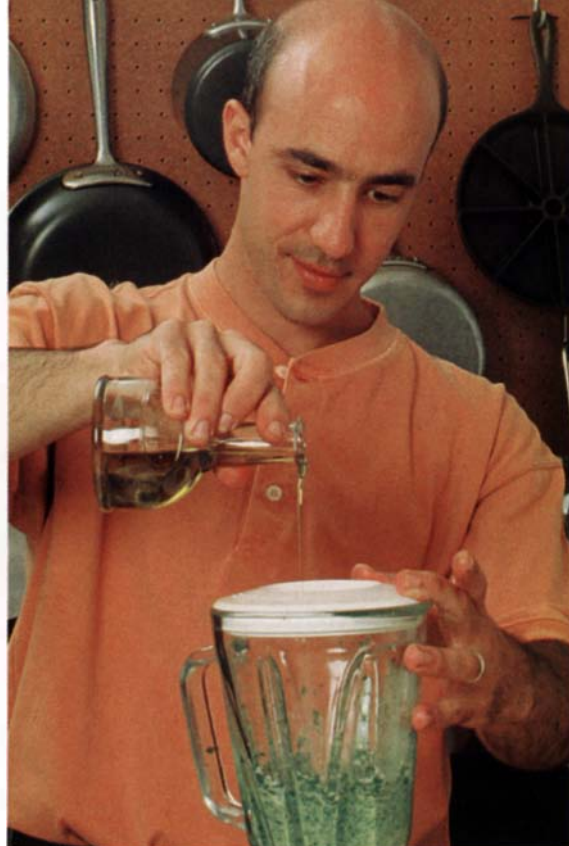
Put the basil in the boiling water, pressing it gently under the water, and cook for just 2 or 3 seconds. Quickly remove the basil from the water (a Chinese strainer works great here) and plunge it immediately into the ice bath to stop the cooking process. Let cool completely for 2 min.

Remove the basil from the ice bath and squeeze it lightly with your hands or in a clean dishtowel to remove most of the excess water.

Chop the basil coarsely with a sharp knife and then put it in a blender. Add the ¼ cup ice water, the garlic, the pine nuts, the cheese, the remaining 1 tsp. salt, and the pepper. Blend until the basil is coarsely puréed, scraping down the sides and adding more water to facilitate blending only if needed. Be patient; don't add more water if it isn't necessary. With the blender running, add the oil in a steady stream until the pesto looks creamy and emulsified. Cover and store in the refrigerator for a few days or in the freezer for up to a few months.

Cilantro-Scallion Pesto

This is just one of many possible variations on the technique for making pesto; you may want to experiment with other tender herbs or greens, such as mint,



Robert Danhi prefers a blender for making pesto.

The action of a blender pulls the ingredients into the blade, whereas food processors spray a good portion of the ingredients against the sides of the bowl.



Freeze pesto in small batches. Flattening the storage bags allows you to stack them in the freezer—and speeds thawing time, too.

spinach, arugula, or a mix of a couple of these. *Yields 1¾ cups.*

- 1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. coarse salt**
- 6 large scallions (green parts only), roughly chopped**
- 1 cup packed roughly chopped cilantro leaves (from about 1 bunch)**
- 1 cup packed roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley (from about ½ bunch)**
- ¼ cup ice water**
- 2 Tbs. pine nuts**
- 2 Tbs. sesame seeds**
- 1 clove garlic, smashed and peeled**

2 tsp. minced fresh ginger
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
½ cup canola, olive, or peanut oil, or a blend

Bring 2 qt. water seasoned with 1 Tbs. of the salt to a rolling boil. Meanwhile, set up an ice bath by combining ice and water in a medium bowl.

Put the scallions, cilantro, and parsley in the boiling water, pressing them gently under the water, and cook for just 2 or 3 seconds. Quickly remove them from the water (a Chinese strainer works great here) and plunge them immediately into the ice bath to stop the cooking process. Let cool completely for 2 min.

Remove the blanched greens from the ice bath and squeeze them lightly with your hands or in a

clean dishtowel to remove most of the excess water.

Chop the greens coarsely with a sharp knife and put them in a blender. Add the ¼ cup ice water, the pine nuts, the sesame seeds, the garlic, the ginger, the remaining 1 tsp. salt, and the pepper. Blend until you get a rough purée, scraping down the sides and adding more water to facilitate blending only if needed. With the blender running, add the oil in a steady stream until the pesto looks creamy and emulsified. Cover and store in the refrigerator for a few days or in the freezer for up to a few months.

Robert Danhi is a chef-instructor at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. ♦

Pesto pasta, potatoes, chicken & more

Pesto can brighten your menu in many ways:

- ♦ Swirl a dollop into a potato, tomato, or white bean soup.
- ♦ Spread some on pizza dough as a base, in place of or in addition to tomato sauce.
- ♦ Add a tablespoon to a simple vinaigrette for drizzling on grilled vegetables.

Or try some of the recipe suggestions below, using either of the recipes at left.

Pesto Pasta: Toss your favorite cooked pasta with pesto that's been thinned slightly with stock or the pasta cooking water; a few tablespoons of pesto per serving works well. Delicious additions might include black olives, chopped tomatoes, toasted breadcrumbs, sautéed or grilled zucchini, roasted peppers, and even grilled chicken.

Pesto Mashed Potatoes: Gently fold some pesto into your favorite mashed potatoes. I use about ¾ cup pesto for mashed potatoes made with 2 pounds potatoes and 1 cup cream or milk (no butter needed). Taste for salt and pepper after adding the pesto.

Chicken Breasts Stuffed with Pesto, Mozzarella & Sun-Dried Tomatoes: On the thickest side of a boneless chicken breast, cut a deep, long pocket. Open the split chicken breast like a book. Spread 1 tablespoon basil pesto over the inside of the breast, sprinkle with about an ounce of grated mozzarella and some finely chopped sun-dried tomatoes (rehydrated if very dry). Fold the breast back together, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and bake in a lightly greased baking pan at 425°F until cooked through,

about 30 minutes. Top with an additional teaspoon or two of warmed pesto after cooking, if you like.

Grilled Eggplant, Goat Cheese & Pesto Sandwiches: Bake or grill slices of eggplant until tender. Spread some pesto on the inside of a split baguette and grill the baguette as well. Top with crumbled fresh goat cheese, tomato, some arugula, and the eggplant slices.

Broiled Shrimp with Cilantro-Scallion Pesto: Devein some large shrimp but don't remove the shell (slit the shell to expose and remove the vein). Toss the shrimp with olive oil and salt and pepper. Spread in a single layer on a baking sheet and broil for about 5 minutes. Flip the shrimp over and cook until opaque all the way through. Serve with the cilantro pesto for dipping and a bowl for the shells.

Pesto Crostini: Slice a baguette into thin rounds; toast the rounds lightly. Spread on a thin layer of pesto and top with thinly sliced tomatoes or roasted red peppers. You can also sprinkle grated Parmesan or mozzarella over the top and broil briefly to melt the cheese.



Pesto pasta



Pesto mashed potatoes



Chicken breasts stuffed with pesto

MASTER CLASS

Rich Fillings and Simple Sauces Make The Best Ravioli

Start with a tender homemade dough and add assertive fillings for stuffed pasta that's packed with flavor

BY ALAN TARDI



A light and gently spicy tomato sauce is the ideal foil for ravioli filled with sausage, mozzarella, and broccoli raab.

To many people, ravioli conjures up a specific image: square mounds of thick, doughy pasta filled with meat or cheese (it's often hard to know which) and smothered with a heavy-duty tomato sauce. A green cylinder of "Parmesan style" grated cheese completes the picture.

That *isn't* the style of pasta I'll show you how to make here. Homemade ravioli can actually be delicate and delicious. In fact, the ravioli dishes at my restaurant can be the most subtle and refined of all my pastas, and their sauces tend to be simple. While unstuffed pastas are often paired with a complex sauce (spaghetti alla puttanesca or fettuccine Bolognese, for example), ravioli are best served in a light cream sauce or in a broth or, as in the recipes here, with a simple roasted tomato sauce or brown butter with Parmesan. These are quick to make, and they complement the ravioli without overwhelming it.

Making ravioli from scratch doesn't require special equipment. A pasta rolling machine makes fast work of rolling out the dough, but it's not essential; a regular rolling pin will suffice. For shaping and cutting the filled pasta, a ravioli mold and a scalloped pastry wheel are nice tools (see Sources, p. 84), but you'll also do fine with a biscuit cutter.

Making your own egg pasta dough takes practice, but it's worth it

Successful ravioli starts with a moist, supple egg pasta dough, which must be rolled into thin sheets,

filled, and then cut into shapes before the dough starts to dry out. If that sounds like it takes some skill, it does, but it's a skill worth having. Once you're comfortable with the technique for making the dough, you can make any homemade pasta you like, such as fettuccine, lasagna, or orecchiette.

Fresh pasta is made with flour, eggs, olive oil, and salt. Italians often use a soft flour called "00," and some recipes call for pastry flour. These are both low in gluten and produce very delicate pasta. At my restaurant, I use a combination of "00" and all-purpose flour, but you'll get excellent results using only all-purpose flour.

Making fresh pasta is more about mastering a process than a specific recipe. Because of variations in different types of flour, sizes of eggs, and even weather conditions, following any one recipe to the letter would probably give you less than optimal results. To tell the truth, I don't even bother measuring my ingredients anymore. I just use the following rule of thumb: one egg per person and between ½ and ¾ cup flour per egg.

The key is to know when to stop mixing in flour. If you don't add enough, the dough will be too wet and will stick during kneading and rolling, which just means you add more flour at that time. But if you go too far, the dough will be hard and dry and will crumble during rolling, and there's no remedy for this except starting again. How can you tell when the dough has enough flour? By sight, to some extent,

Three tips for making tender, moist pasta dough



A deep, wide well of flour makes a tidy mixing bowl. Start beating the eggs with a fork, being sure to stay in the center as you bring in flour from the sides.



The dough will tell you when it has enough flour. The dough will become smooth and homogeneous and won't easily absorb more flour.



An "innie" becomes an "outie." When the dough is sufficiently kneaded, a finger dent will bounce back. Stick your finger into the center; it should feel a bit tacky.

Roll the dough very thin for delicate—not doughy—ravioli



If using a pin, divide the dough (leaving one half in the refrigerator, wrapped in plastic) and roll the other half into a very thin sheet, keeping the surface floured. Aim for an even rectangle.

but even more by the way it feels. It won't easily absorb more flour, and you'll notice that dried bits of floury dough are flaking off the mass.

Before starting to knead, scrape up all the leftover flour on the work surface. Pass the flour through a sieve; you'll see lots of hardened dough bits left behind. Throw them out. While some frugal Tuscan cooks save these (boiled in a broth, they turn into tiny pasta dumplings), you don't want them floating around in your dough. They wouldn't integrate and would create holes when the dough is rolled out. Keep the sifted flour handy because you'll need a bit more for the next step, which is kneading.

You'll knead the dough until it becomes smooth and resilient. If it needs more flour to keep it from sticking to the work surface, that's fine, but again, don't add too much.



When you can just see the shape and shadow of your hand through the sheet, stop rolling; it should be about $\frac{1}{32}$ inch thick. (Continue with the photos on p. 70.)

By the way, you can mix the dough in an electric mixer using a dough hook attachment if you want, but unless you're making a lot of pasta dough, you'll probably lose more time cleaning the machine than you saved in the mixing.

Roll the dough so your hand shows through

The next steps are the most critical parts of Operation Ravioli: rolling out the dough, spooning on small mounds of filling, and then cutting the pasta into shapes.

Whether you use a rolling pin or a pasta machine (see instructions for both on this page and the next), the goal is to get a long, thin sheet that's as evenly rectangular as possible. Ideally, it should be about $\frac{1}{32}$ inch thick. If it's thicker, the ravioli will be doughy and the filling lost amidst all the pasta. If the dough is too thin, however, the stuffing will break through. The dough is thin enough when you can just about see the outline of your hand through the sheet of pasta.

Work quickly so the dough sheets don't dry out. Thin sheets of pasta dough lose moisture quickly, so be prepared to move ahead without stopping for other tasks (meaning make your filling ahead). If you notice the edges of the sheets cracking, cover the dough with a damp paper towel to help rehydrate it. Dry dough won't seal well, and the pasta may break when you try to stuff or shape it.

Handle the pasta sheets with your wrists, not your fingers. The rolled-out dough sheets aren't fragile, but to avoid puncturing or tearing them, it's best to move one around by letting it drape over your wrist and the back of your hand.

You'll have the filling already made before rolling out the dough, but before you spoon it on, taste it for

proper seasoning. (You can't correct a bland filling once it's sealed inside the pasta.)

How big the mounds are and how closely you space them determines the size of the ravioli and the width of their borders. For example, if you space the mounds about ½ inch apart, each ravioli will have a ¼-inch border, which is about right for my taste. For that size, you'll need about 2 teaspoons filling in each mound. Resist the urge to make huge mounds, or you'll have to stretch the top sheet of dough to cover them, which could cause the filling to break through.

One more tip: Brush any excess flour from the top of each sheet before filling, but be sure the surface underneath is liberally floured to prevent sticking.

When it's time to cut the ravioli into shapes, you can use a scalloped or straight pastry wheel, a ravioli stamp, or even a biscuit cutter. A sharp knife will work, too, but be careful that it doesn't tear the dough, and use the flat side of fork tines or your fingers to confirm the seal.

The ravioli must be cooked within a day or else frozen. If you're not cooking the ravioli immediately, line a baking sheet with parchment or waxed paper and sprinkle with semolina or cornmeal, which will absorb moisture and prevent the dough from getting soggy. Arrange the ravioli so they don't touch or they'll stick together. Refrigerate them uncovered for up to a day or else put the baking sheet in the freezer. When the ravioli are frozen solid, transfer them to an airtight container. Cook frozen ravioli directly in a pot of rapidly boiling salted water (no need to defrost them first), adding a few at a time and stirring occasionally to keep them separate.

Ravioli Pasta Dough

Italians use a very fine flour called "00" in pasta dough (see Sources, p. 84), but all-purpose works well, too. You won't use all 4 cups of flour, but the extra helps keep the eggs contained in the well. *Yields 1 lb. dough, enough for the recipes on pp. 70–71.*

18 oz. (4 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour or "00" flour, or a combination
4 large eggs
1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
½ tsp. coarse salt

Review the text and captions before you start. Dump the flour in a pile on a work surface. Make a deep, wide well in the center and pour in the eggs, olive oil, and salt. Begin mixing the eggs with a fork, staying in the center and being careful that the eggs don't breach the wall. Little by little, mix in flour from the sides until the dough starts to move as a unit and is too stiff to mix with a fork. Continue mixing by hand, incorporating more flour to stiffen the dough. When it doesn't easily absorb more flour (one signal is floury, dried bits of dough flaking off the mass), set the dough aside; scrape up all the remaining flour and pass it through a sieve to sift out any dried-up bits. Discard the bits and keep the cup or two of sifted flour on the work surface to use during kneading if necessary.

Wash and dry your hands. Knead the dough on the lightly floured surface until it's a smooth, homogenous ball of dough, firm but resilient, neither too dry nor too soft, about 5 min.; it should no longer stick to the surface. Poke it and it should spring right back; press your finger into the center and it should feel just a bit tacky. If it's very sticky, knead in more flour.

Wrap the dough loosely in plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, or up to 8 hours. *(More recipes follow)*

A pasta machine eases the way to a thin sheet

If using a pasta machine, divide the dough into four equal pieces. Work with one piece at a time, keeping the others refrigerated, wrapped in plastic.

- ♦ Flatten the piece of dough with your hand (flour it lightly if necessary) and run it through the widest setting on the machine twice. The first pass roughs up the dough; the second pass smoothes it out.
- ♦ Set the rollers to the next narrower setting. Pass the dough through twice. Continue notching down by one setting and passing the dough through two times. As the dough lengthens and thins, it will bunch up under the machine. Rectify this by gently lifting it out and folding it neatly behind the machine.
- ♦ When you can just see the shape and shadow of your hand through the dough sheet (it should be about ⅓ inch thick), stop rolling. You may not need to go to the narrowest setting. Fill and cut it as instructed in the following photos.



Fill and shape the ravioli



Cut the sheet in half crosswise and trim the sides to make two neat rectangles, one slightly larger than the other. On the smaller sheet, spoon mounds of 1 to 2 teaspoons filling, leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch between each mound. (For smaller ravioli, use less filling in each mound and space them more closely; for larger ravioli, use more.) Brush a little beaten egg yolk on the dough around each mound of filling.

Sausage & Broccoli Raab Ravioli with Roasted Tomato Sauce

The roasted tomato sauce can be made several days ahead, and the filling can be made a day ahead. *Yields about 30 ravioli (more or fewer depending on the size and dough thickness) and 4 cups sauce; serves four.*

FOR THE SAUCE:

4 lb. fresh plum tomatoes (about 22), quartered
3 medium red onions (about 1 lb. total),
very coarsely diced
16 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
2 to 3 fresh jalapeños, quartered
1 Tbs. dried oregano
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE FILLING:

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. ($\frac{1}{2}$ bunch) broccoli raab
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. sweet Italian sausage (casings removed),
crumbled into bits
1 small clove garlic, chopped
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. crushed red chile flakes
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
 $1\frac{1}{4}$ oz. grated pecorino romano cheese ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup)
 $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. smoked or regular mozzarella, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch
dice (to yield $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)

1 lb. Ravioli Pasta Dough (see the recipe on p. 69)
1 large egg yolk, lightly beaten

Semolina flour or fine cornmeal to dust the pan

Grated pecorino romano cheese for garnish

To make the sauce—Heat the oven to 450°F. In a nonreactive roasting pan (not aluminum), combine



Lay the second sheet of dough on top, draping it gently over the mounds without stretching it. Starting at one edge, gently press around the filling to push out any air pockets and seal the sheets.



Cut the pasta in between the mounds to form individual squares or circles with a scalloped pastry wheel or a ravioli stamp (if you don't have either of these, try a biscuit cutter or a paring knife). Press on the mounds a bit to slightly flatten them and on the edges to confirm the seal. Roll out, fill, and cut any remaining dough the same way.

the tomatoes, onions, crushed garlic, jalapeños, and oregano. Add the olive oil, salt, and pepper, and toss. Roast, stirring occasionally, until the onions and tomatoes are soft and slightly charred, about 1 ½ hours.

Let the mixture cool and then pass it through a food mill fitted with a medium blade (or else through a medium-meshed sieve) to remove the seeds and cores. The sauce may be slightly chunky. If you want it smoother, purée it in a blender or food processor. Taste for salt and set aside.

To make the filling—Boil about 4 cups salted water in a pot, add the broccoli raab, and parboil for 2 to 3 min. Drain, but reserve ¼ cup of the cooking water. Chop the broccoli raab into very small pieces.

Heat the olive oil on medium high in a heavy-based frying pan. Add the sausage, breaking it up with a spoon into very small pieces. Add the garlic, red chile flakes, broccoli raab, salt, and pepper. Add the ¼ cup of reserved broccoli raab cooking liquid and simmer until the sausage is cooked and the broccoli raab is tender, about 4 min. There should be no more than 2 Tbs. liquid left in the pan. Transfer to a bowl and let cool. The cooled mixture should be moist but not wet, so if there's excess liquid in the bowl, drain it off. Mix in the 1 ¼ oz. pecorino and the diced mozzarella.

To roll out and stuff the pasta dough—Using the sausage and broccoli raab filling, follow the photos and captions on pp. 68-70 (if using a machine, start on p. 69). If you're not cooking the ravioli right away, transfer them to a pan lined with waxed paper and sprinkled with semolina flour or cornmeal (don't let them touch) and refrigerate for up to a day or freeze, wrapped, for up to a month.

When ready to serve, bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Gently slide the chilled or frozen ravioli into the water and cook until they float and are tender, 3 to 5 min. Meanwhile, reheat the roasted tomato sauce. Taste for salt and pepper. If the sauce is too thick, add a little water from the pasta pot.

Drain the ravioli and toss with the sauce. Spoon onto a large serving platter or individual plates, sprinkle with pecorino, and serve.

Goat Cheese & Fresh Herb Ravioli with Asparagus & Brown Butter

The filling can be made up to two days ahead. If you have extra, try it on a sandwich with roasted peppers. *Yields about thirty ravioli; serves four.*

FOR THE FILLING:

1 lb. fresh goat cheese, at room temperature

½ tsp. finely chopped garlic

1 Tbs. dry white wine

2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil

Grated zest of 1 lemon

½ cup finely chopped mixed fresh herbs (try any combination of flat-leaf parsley, tarragon, chervil, cilantro, thyme, basil, chives, or mint)

1 Tbs. fine fresh breadcrumbs

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1 lb. Ravioli Pasta Dough (see the recipe on p. 69)

1 large egg yolk, lightly beaten

Semolina flour or fine cornmeal to dust the pan

FOR THE SAUCE:

¼ lb. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter

Salt to taste

½ lb. asparagus, parboiled for 1 to 2 min. until tender, and cut into 1-inch pieces

2 Tbs. freshly grated Parmesan cheese, preferably *parmigiano reggiano*, for garnish

Chervil, parsley, or basil sprigs for garnish

To make the filling—Put the goat cheese in a mixing bowl. Add the garlic, wine, olive oil, and lemon zest. Mash the cheese with a whisk or a rubber spatula. Stir in the chopped herbs and breadcrumbs. Season with salt and pepper. Refrigerate until ready to use.

To roll out and stuff the pasta dough—Using the goat cheese filling, follow the photos and captions on pp. 68–70 (if using a machine, start on p. 69). If you're not cooking the ravioli right away, transfer them



to a pan lined with waxed paper and sprinkled with semolina flour or cornmeal (don't let them touch) and refrigerate for up to a day or freeze, wrapped, for up to a month.

When ready to serve, bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Gently slide the chilled or frozen ravioli into the water and cook until they float and are tender, 3 to 5 min.

To make the sauce—Meanwhile, melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat, whisking occasionally, until the butter solids turn a light brown. Season with salt and add the asparagus.

Drain the ravioli and toss with the asparagus and brown butter. Spoon onto a large serving platter or individual plates, sprinkle with the Parmesan, garnish with the herb sprigs, and serve.

These ravioli were properly sealed, ensuring the goat cheese and herb filling didn't leak during cooking. A brown butter sauce enriches without overwhelming.

Alan Tardi is the chef-owner of Follonico restaurant in New York City. ♦

Scoops for Ice Cream and More



A perfect scoop of ice cream begs for a sugar cone.



Cookies bake up the same size when dropped by a “disher.” You may have to special-order these small versions.

An open-sided scoop is the ice-cream pros' favorite, but a trigger-release disher is best for batters

BY JOANNE McALLISTER SMART

On your list of important cooking tools, ice-cream scoops probably don't rank very high. I went without one for years, sacrificing a soup spoon instead, its handle bent way back in its noble effort of trying to scoop hard ice cream. But now that I've got a few good “dishers” on hand, I use them not just for scooping ice cream, but for muffin batters and cookie doughs, too—and I save my poor spoons for soup.

The most traditional scoop is best suited to non-ice-cream duties

For many people, the half-sphere, trigger-release scoop, the kind with a scraping blade set flush against the bowl (like the one at left) is what comes to mind when they think of an ice-cream scoop. But perhaps it shouldn't be. “The problem with the squeeze type,” notes Jonathan White of Egg Farm Dairy, “is that after the third scoop or so, the metal gets so chilled that the ice cream freezes onto it, and even the scraper-bale has a hard time releasing



Vollrath's handles are color-coded by size. The trigger on the side lets you get a good grip.



A lever that works for righties and lefties. Oxo's bowl release works best with hard ice cream.



The beak on this open-sided Oxo scoop is perfect for pints. The non-stick bowl is a plus.



Pros prefer an open-sided scoop. The Zeroll model here has a defrosting liquid inside.



A comfy squeeze-handle disher. Zeroll's models have no springs to break or lose.

the ball." This proved to be true when I tried these models, and it would be a real nuisance if, like White, you're called upon to scoop lots of ice cream at, say, a state fair. (Egg Farm Dairy makes fantastic ice cream, by the way.) But for just a few portions of ice cream, you should be able to get some nicely shaped balls of ice cream with the better versions of this scoop style.

Consider trigger-release scoops made by Vollrath (top left), which come in a variety of sizes and cost about \$9. Not only does the Vollrath's sharp edge cut well through hard ice cream, but its design also allows you to get a good, forceful grip on the handle before using a trigger release with your thumb—in contrast to scoops whose entire handle gets squeezed together to prompt the release (above, far right). As a lefty, I thought I'd like the latter style better, since the Vollrath's trigger is set up for use with your right thumb only. But being able to grab the handle firmly outweighs having to switch the scoop to my right hand to release.

The best use for trigger-release scoops is portioning batter and cookie dough. Zeroll, which makes a variety of ice-cream scoops, calls its trigger-release scoop a food disher; the words ice cream aren't even on the box. Indeed, these scoops, which come in a wide range of sizes, are ideal for portion-



Portion muffin batter quickly with a trigger-release scoop. A dip in water between scoops speeds things along.

Spades aren't necessarily for serving—unless you want a lot of ice cream.



A spade packs best. If you make your own ice cream, it's worth getting one of these.



ing out muffin batter, and a small scoop works well for most drop cookies, yielding uniform sizes and shapes. (And, if you're a caterer or in the food-service business, uniform portions of rice, mashed potatoes, tuna salad, chicken salad...you get the idea.) The scoops also work well on softer ice products like sorbet and nougat glacé.

The number on the disher refers to how many portions per quart the scoop yields, but this varies depending on the density of the food. There are also slight differences among manufacturers. For example, Zeroll's #20 disher has a bowl diameter of 2½ inches and holds 1.77 fluid ounces, while Vollrath's #20 is 2 inches in diameter and holds 1.66 fluid ounces. Kathleen Stewart, who runs the Downtown Bakery in Healdsburg, California, likes a #16 scoop for conventional-size muffin tins. She also recommends dipping the scoop in water between scoops. A good size for drop cookies is #40, which equals about one heaping tablespoon of dough.

When looking for a trigger-release scoop, be sure that it's comfortable to hold and easy to squeeze; if it isn't, it may mean that the cogs and ratchets don't mesh well.

Better options for scooping ice cream

The classic open-sided scoop is a favorite among pros. Next time you're in an ice-cream shop, take a look at what the kid behind the counter is using. Chances are it's the open-sided design, which

creates nicely round balls of ice cream when you draw it straight back along the surface of the ice cream about ¼ inch deep. (This scooping motion works best in half-gallon containers or larger, which give you room to scrape.) Some manufacturers offer a variety of sizes for these open-sided scoops that can be ordered directly from the company and through some retail outlets (see Sources, p. 84), but in kitchenware stores, you'll mostly find the #20 scoop, which holds about 2 ounces of ice cream. (This style tends to hold more than the dishers, and so it doesn't correspond to the numbers for disher-style scoops.)

Manufacturers of open-sided scoops include Zeroll, Henckels, Rösle, and Cuisipro, all of which feature a handy hole for hanging up the scoop. Zeroll scoops, which retail for about \$20, transfer heat from your hand to the scoop via a liquid-filled handle. If your ice cream is really hard, running the scoop under warm water will help get the ice-cream balls rolling, so to speak. One caveat: Ice-cream scoops with anti-frost handles can't go in the dishwasher.

A spade is great for packing your own ice cream. The other scoop you'll see at an ice-cream shop looks more like a spade and also comes in models filled with defrosting liquid. Pros use these not so much for serving ice cream but for packing it into pints and for knocking ice cream off the sides of the large tubs from which they scoop. Both practices can be useful at home, depending on your ice-cream consumption and how often you make your own. Spades make quick work of transferring ice cream from an ice-cream maker to a storage bowl. The spade's curved edge also works well for scrap-

ing down the ice cream stuck to the sides of the container. (It's this clinging ice cream that gets freezer burn first; by scraping it off the sides and leveling the ice cream, you'll help prevent ice crystals from forming, mixing with the rest of the ice cream, and giving it that off flavor.)

Kim Forbes, a representative of Zeroll, offers another use for the spade: "It's useful for cutting a big old slab of ice cream for a piece of cake." I found that this works especially well when slicing ice cream from a rectangular half-gallon container. Forbes's other reason for owning a spade is more compelling: "It's great if you like huge portions."

For scoop and spade sources, see p. 84.

Spades are great for packing, and for serving huge portions.

Joanne McAllister Smart is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦



It's Cherry Season!

Cherry-studded focaccia, a creamy mousse, and an almond-topped custard tart make the most of this fruit's brief appearance

BY FRAN GAGE

I heard about Butler Ranch, about a two-hour drive from where I live in San Francisco, years ago from a FedEx driver. Last summer, my husband and I finally made it there. After a drive up some winding roads, we spotted the hand-lettered sign announcing “cherries” and pointing the way up a dirt road. It’s a pick-your-own operation, and we were greeted by a wonderful sight: row after row of trees laden with fruit. The branches, heavy from the fruit, slumped so close to the ground that we could easily reach the cherries without a ladder.

Cherries are one of the few fruits still truly seasonal, and a short season it is, lasting from mid June to mid August. I had intended to pick only a modest amount, but it had been so long since I’d had fresh cherries, and the fruit was so luscious and came off the trees so effortlessly that when we weighed our bounty we had eighteen (eighteen!) pounds.

A soothing and not-too-sweet slice. The toasty flavor of the almonds rounds out the slightly eggy custard and the abundance of cherries in this tart.



The cherries we picked were Bings, the most popular and widely distributed sweet cherry variety. I can eat these cherries—with their shiny deep-red skin, crisp texture, and sweet juice—by the handful raw. But even I, a true lover of cherries, would not be able to enjoy all of our bounty in the four or five days that fresh cherries last. So we gave some to neighbors. I divided a few pounds among large jars, covered the cherries with vodka and a little sugar, sealed them, and stowed them away in a cupboard to add to cakes and scones during the winter holidays. I also made preserves, an arduous task with all that pitting. I still had a few pounds to go, so I turned my thoughts to cooking with them. While cherries do make their way into savory dishes, my expertise is in baking, so desserts took center stage.

Raw cherries add texture and flavor; baking softens both aspects

One of the best things about eating cherries raw is the tension between the fruit's firm, shiny skin and its supple, juicy interior. A great way to feature that is to create a fruit salad based on cherries. Mangos and kiwis, with their softer textures and bright flavors, make good companions. A few slivers of mint and a splash of dessert wine bring everything together. I also like to serve raw cherries with feta cheese; the salty cheese accentuates the sweetness of the cherries. In another quick dessert, I fold puréed raw cherries into whipped cream for a refreshing mousse.

Once you cook a cherry, it loses some of the excitement inherent in the raw fruit. The resulting softer flavor and texture creates dishes more sooth-



To enjoy the juicy texture of raw cherries, try them in a salad with mangos, kiwis, and a touch of mint.

ing than spirited. Strewn on top of focaccia and then baked, cherries add just the right touch of sweetness; the bread is wonderful for breakfast or as a snack with tea. In the custard tart, the baked cherries are assertive enough to announce their presence but also restrained enough to allow the complementary almond flavor to play a role as well. (Maybe the reason cherries and almonds are a classic combination is because cherry pits have a hint of almond flavor in them.)

Poaching preserves cherries and lets you boost flavor. Even after trying all these ideas, I still had cherries left, so I decided to poach some in sugar syrup, thus extending their life a few more weeks in my refrigerator. I chose a light syrup so the cherries weren't drowning in a sugary suspension, a fate that canned cherries often suffer. I kept the sugar level down and added some peppercorns and citrus zest for interest. Ice cream—vanilla is good, but chocolate is great—reaches another level with a topping of these poached cherries.

Add a little color or a little pucker with other cherry varieties

Here in California, a few other varieties of sweet cherries are available besides Bings. Lambert and Van are dark-red cherries; good, but not quite as flavorful as Bings, to my taste. Rainier, yellow-hued with thin skin, is juicy and sweet with better flavor than the Royal Ann, another pale variety; both look great tossed with Bings on top of the focaccia or in the fruit salad. These paler cherries are more fragile, so check them for bruises before buying. As with darker cherries, they should be shiny and firm.

Two tools for quicker pitting

While you could pit your cherries with your fingers, one of these tools will make the job a lot easier. For Sources, see p. 84.



A hand-held pitter pokes out pits, but the going is slow.



If you buy a lot of cherries, consider this speedier pitter. The pits fall into the box while the pitted cherries roll into a bowl.

Traditionally, people baked with sour cherries, such as the Montmorency. But sour cherries, grown primarily in Michigan, are now used almost exclusively for processed cherry products and are hard to find fresh. If you do come across them, you can use them in place of some or all of the sweet cherries in these recipes; they do have a more intense flavor. All cherries will keep for three or four days in the refrigerator, but the sooner you use them, the better.

Oh yeah, the pits

All cherries not eaten out of hand have one drawback: they must be pitted. If faced with just a few, you can pry out the stones with your fingers, but the cherries will look battered. Hand-held pitters do a neater job, but it's slow going. Small, countertop pitters with a hopper on top and a box on the bottom (see the photo at left) are much faster. A plunger pushes the pits into the box and the cherries fall from a chute into a waiting bowl. (See Sources, p. 84, for both styles.) Both types will miss some pits, especially if the cherries are large, so check each cherry. And all pitting methods will stain your fingers, which you can wear with pride as a sign of eating fresh cherries in season. But you might want to know that rubbing your hands with a cut lemon will remove the stains.

Cherry Breakfast Focaccia

This bread is wonderful for breakfast. Bake it the evening before, or if you're an early riser, let the dough rise overnight in the refrigerator and then shape and bake it in the morning. *Yields one 10x10-inch square loaf, about six servings.*

¾ cup plus 2 Tbs. warm water
2¼ tsp. active dry yeast
10 oz. (2¼ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
¼ cup packed light brown sugar
1¼ tsp. extra-fine sea salt or table salt
3 oz. (¾ cup) dried sour cherries
½ lb. fresh sweet cherries, rinsed, pitted, and halved
1 Tbs. sugar

Put the water in the bowl of a heavy-duty mixer and sprinkle the yeast over the water; let it stand for a few minutes to dissolve and become creamy. Add the flour, brown sugar, salt, and dried cherries. Knead on medium speed with a dough hook until the dough comes together and will hold a finger imprint, 5 to 7 min. Or knead by hand on a floured surface. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let it sit at room temperature until it doubles in volume, 2½ to 3 hours.

Turn the dough onto a lightly floured work surface. Using a rolling pin, shape it into a 10x10-inch square, trying to keep the thickness even throughout. Put the dough on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Slip the

Cherries flavor focaccia inside and out. As they bake, the cherry halves sink into the dough, permeating the bread with flavor.



baking sheet into a large plastic bag and seal the bag with a twist tie (or cover the dough with a large bowl). Put it in a warm place until the dough doubles in bulk, 45 to 60 min. and up to 1 ½ hours if the dough is cold from the refrigerator.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Remove the pan from the plastic bag. Gently dimple the top of the dough with your fingertips. Strew the fresh cherries on top and sprinkle with the sugar. Bake in the middle of the oven until the top is brown and the cherries are soft, 20 to 25 min.

Cherry Custard Tart with Sliced Almonds

This tart has everything going for it: a silky custard, sweet cherries, and a crunchy almond topping. This tart dough is more like a cookie dough because the butter gets mixed with the sugar instead of being left in pieces. Blind baking the tart shell keeps the bottom crust from getting soggy. This recipe makes enough for two crusts; divide the dough and freeze half for future use (defrost it in the refrigerator overnight before rolling it out). *Yields enough dough for two 9½-inch tarts; serves eight.*

FOR THE TART DOUGH:

6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
4½ oz. (1 cup) confectioners' sugar
1¾ oz. almonds, finely ground in a food processor to yield just under ½ cup
1 large egg, at room temperature
½ tsp. vanilla extract
9 oz. (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
¼ tsp. salt

This cookie-like tart dough is easy to handle.

Transfer it by rolling it onto the pin and then unrolling it over the tart pan.



A pressing of the rolling pin gives your tart clean edges. Use the excess dough to patch any holes if needed.

FOR THE CHERRY CUSTARD FILLING:

1 lb. fresh sweet cherries, rinsed and pitted
⅔ cup heavy or whipping cream
⅓ cup sugar
2 large eggs
⅓ cup sliced almonds, toasted

To make the dough—Beat the butter and confectioners' sugar in a heavy-duty mixer with the paddle attachment until mixed together. Add the ground almonds, egg, and vanilla, and then the flour and salt. Mix until just combined. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface, shape into two disks, and wrap both in plastic. Refrigerate one disk for at least 1 hour and up to 3 days; freeze the other for future use.

To assemble and bake—Heat the oven to 400°F. Remove the dough from the refrigerator. On a lightly floured work surface, roll it into a round ⅛ inch thick. (If the dough crumbles, it's too cold; gather it into a ball, knead a few turns, and roll again.)

Transfer the dough by rolling it onto the rolling pin and then unrolling it over a 9- or 9½-inch fluted tart pan that's 1 inch deep and has a removable bottom. Gently ease the dough into the bottom and up the sides of the pan. To remove excess dough, run the rolling pin over the top of the edges to cut it off. Put the pan on a baking sheet, line the dough with parchment, and fill it with pie weights, dried beans, or rice. Bake it in the middle of the oven until the sides are set, 10 to 15 min. Carefully remove the weights and parchment, return the shell to the oven, and bake until the bottom is set and the crust is light brown, another 7 min.

Spread the cherries in the bottom of the tart crust in one layer (you can do this while the tart is still hot).



A sweet, creamy custard surrounds whole sweet cherries. Pay attention as you pour so that you don't overfill the crust; you might have a little extra custard.



Poached cherries transform predictable ice cream into a surprisingly fabulous dessert.

Whisk together the cream, sugar, and eggs and carefully pour the mixture over the cherries until the custard comes just to the top of the pan; you may have an extra tablespoon or so of custard remaining. Sprinkle the almonds on top. Return the tart to the oven and bake until the top is brown and the cherries are bubbling, about 40 min. Let the tart cool until you can remove it from the pan.

Cherry, Mango, Kiwi & Mint Salad

This is a great brunch salad, but it also works as a refreshing end to a meal. *Yields 6 cups.*

- 1 lb. fresh sweet cherries, rinsed and pitted**
- 2 large ripe mangos, cut into ¾- to 1-inch chunks**
- 2 kiwis, peeled, each cut into 8 lengthwise wedges, and wedges cut in half crosswise**
- 12 large mint leaves, cut in a chiffonade (stacked, rolled, and thinly sliced crosswise)**
- ½ cup dessert wine, such as Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise**
- 2 Tbs. light brown sugar**
- 1 tsp. grated orange zest**
- Pinch salt**

Toss all the ingredients together and refrigerate for at least 2 hours and for as long as 6 hours.

Poached Cherries

If you get carried away at a market, or if your cherry tree produces a bumper crop, here's a solution. Pitted, poached cherries will keep in the refrigerator for a few weeks, ready to be spooned over ice cream or layered with the cherry mousse at right for a quick but elegant dessert. *Yields 2½ cups.*

- 1¾ cups water**
- ⅔ cup sugar**
- 3 strips lemon zest, 1x3 inches each**
- 3 strips orange zest, 1x3 inches each**



Pretty please, with a cherry on top. Layer cherry mousse and poached cherries for a delicious and pretty parfait.

- ¼ vanilla bean, split but not scraped**
- 15 peppercorns**
- 1 lb. fresh sweet cherries, rinsed and pitted**

In a saucepan, bring the water, sugar, citrus zest, vanilla bean, and peppercorns to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Add the cherries and simmer until they're soft but not falling apart, about 10 min. Skim any foam from the surface. Let cool and then refrigerate. Strain the poaching liquid before serving.

Cherry Mousse

For this quick, delicious dessert, puréed cherries are folded into whipped cream and served in Champagne flutes or small parfait glasses. Assemble these at the last minute so the cherries don't darken. The mousse is also great layered with the poached cherries at left. *Yields 6 cups; serves six.*

- 1 lb. fresh sweet cherries, rinsed**
- 3 Tbs. confectioners' sugar**
- 2 cups heavy or whipping cream, preferably not ultra-pasteurized**

Set aside 6 whole cherries (with stems if they're still attached) and pit the rest. Combine the pitted cherries and 1 Tbs. of the confectioners' sugar in a food processor and purée; they will be slightly chunky.

Whip the cream with the remaining 2 Tbs. confectioners' sugar until medium peaks form. Fold in the cherry purée and distribute the mousse among the glasses. Top with the reserved cherries and serve.

Fran Gage owned and ran Pâtisserie Française in San Francisco for ten years. She now works as a food writer, a teacher, and a consultant. She's the author of Bread & Chocolate: My Food Life in San Francisco and is part of the group of chefs working on The Baker's Dozen cookbook. ♦

Which clam is which?

Briny, succulent, and sweet, clams make great party fare. A heaping platter of steamed clams takes only minutes to prepare and is perfectly suited to picnic-table dining with no fancy accoutrements other than melted butter and cold beer. The only real trick to clams is knowing what's what at the seafood counter.

Clams are separated into two categories—**soft-shell** and **hard-shell**. The name “soft-shell” is a bit of a misnomer, since the shells aren't truly soft, but they are thin and brittle. These clams have a dark, hose-like protuberance that keeps the elongated shells from closing tightly. This neck (or foot, as it's sometimes called) is used to siphon and release ocean water and earns these clams

the nicknames **longneck clams** or **pisser clams**. Because soft-shell clams gape open, they're highly perishable and should be cooked within a day of purchase. Soft-shell

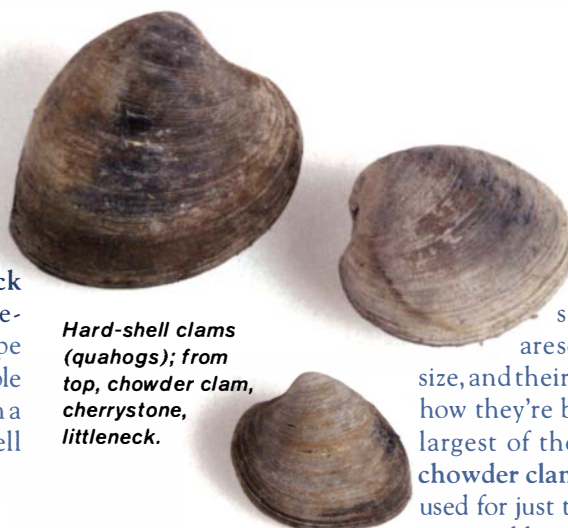
Soft-shell clams (steamers)



clams also tend to collect more sand and grit than other clams, and many recipes will instruct you to first soak them in a bowl of cold salted water for a few hours to purge the sand.

Soft-shell clams are never eaten raw, and the most common way to prepare them is by

Hard-shell clams (quahogs); from top, chowder clam, cherrystone, littleneck.



steaming or frying, hence their other nicknames, **steamers** and **fryers**. When steaming, most cooks skip the soaking step and simply serve the steamed clams with a bowl of clam broth (the liquid they were cooked in) for dipping to rinse off any grit.

Hard-shell clams come in many shapes and sizes. On the Atlantic coast where clams reign, the most common variety of hard-shell clam is the **quahog** (pronounced KWAH-hahg) with its thick, tough,

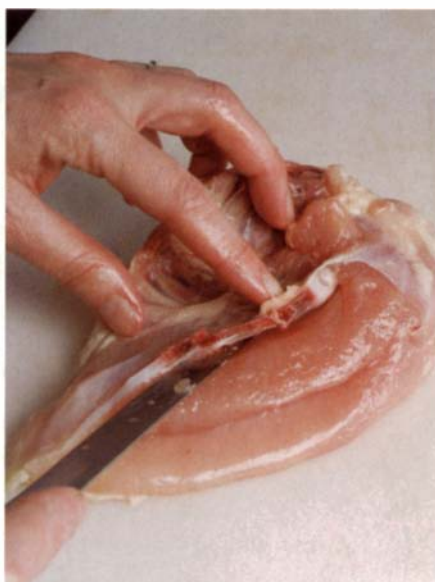
pale-colored shell. Quahogs are sold according to size, and their size determines how they're best eaten. The largest of these are sold as **chowder clams**, and are best used for just that—chopping up to add to chowders and stews. Chowder clams can be as big as your fist and weigh anywhere from 5 ounces and up (a single chowder clam often weighs over ½ pound). Because of their size, they tend to be tough and not as sweet as smaller varieties.

Cherrystone clams are the next size down of quahogs, less than 3 inches across and in the 2- to 4-ounce range. These are sweeter and more tender than larger clams and are excellent for stuffing and broiling. They are sometimes eaten raw, al-

To bone a chicken breast, just follow the rib cage

Figuring out how to bone a piece of poultry is easy because the bones are either visible or quite easy to locate by touch, unlike the bones in a large piece of meat. If the breast halves are still attached, cut them apart at the breastbone, ideally with a pair of poultry shears, which is an amazingly powerful tool that cuts through bones like they're potato chips. No shears? No problem—just use a chef's knife. For taking out the small bones, use a sharp, thin-bladed knife (a boning knife, if you have one, or a paring knife).

Each breast half will be a little different, depending on how the bird was initially butchered, so just feel your way as you go.



Start by sliding the blade of your knife along the remnant of the flat, blade-like breastbone, angling the cutting edge ever so slightly into the bone to avoid deep cuts into the flesh. Use short, swiping strokes as you work.



Continue working on the ribs by sliding the blade under the set of finger-like rib bones and working toward the outer edge of the breast until the ribs and breastbone are free. With the tip of the knife, cut around the shoulder joint where the wing bone had been attached to the breast.



Mahogany clams
(ocean quahogs)

though some people consider cherrystones just a bit too large to be eaten on the half shell.

Littleneck clams, named for Littleneck Bay on Long Island, are the smallest, most delectable, and most expensive of the quahog clams. Measuring 1½ to just over 2 inches across and weighing a mere 1 to 2 ounces each, these tender little clams are the best for eating raw, steaming whole, or adding whole (steamed in their shells) to dishes such as pasta sauce or seafood stew.

Mahogany clams are another variety of hard-shell clam, easily recognizable by the reddish-brown color of their shells. Commercially known as **ocean quahogs**, they can grow quite large, but most are harvested in the 1½- to 3-inch range and can be used any-

where you'd use cherrystones or littlenecks.

Surf clams or hen clams are a large variety of hard-shell clam with very pale, triangular shells, but they're rarely sold retail in their whole form. Because of their size and subsequent toughness, surf clams are most often processed and sold in cans and frozen as chopped clams.

When buying live clams, tap the shells to detect some movement—a retraction of the neck for soft-shell clams or the snapping closed of the shells for hard-shells. If the clams don't respond, they're dead, or dying, and should not be eaten. Store clams in an open bag in the refrigerator.

—Molly Stevens,
contributing editor

Hulling strawberries

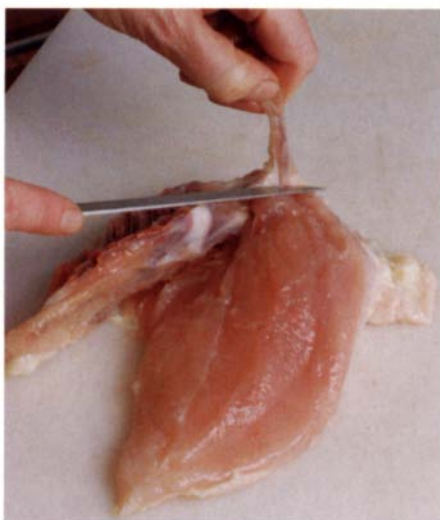
To remove the stem and fibrous core of a strawberry, use a sharp paring knife (or a tool called a huller, if you have one). Be sure to rinse the strawberries before you hull them, or they'll absorb water and become soggy. With a very ripe berry, you can sometimes tug on the stem with your fingers and it will come right out. At the other end of the spectrum, an underripe berry with large white "shoulders" should be trimmed more severely. In that case, cut off the flavorless white part entirely. —M. S.



To hull a ripe strawberry, hold a paring knife at an angle and, with the tip, carve out a small cone-shaped wedge from the top of the berry, removing as little flesh as possible.



If you're using a huller, simply pinch the green leafy part at its base and yank—the stem will pull right out.



Feel with your fingers along the top edge of the breast meat for a short bone (half of the wishbone). With the tip of your knife, free the tip of that bone. Holding the bone tip in one hand, scrape along the bone with the knife to free it from the meat, working back toward the joint where the wishbone connects with the rib structure.



Cut through the connective tissue that's holding the bone to the meat and pull off the ribs and wishbone together, cutting any remaining bits of meat that are hanging on. You may be left with a thin flap of rib meat, which you can trim off to make a neater breast that will cook evenly.



Flip the breast over, trim any straggly bits, and smooth out the skin. Save the bones for stock or just discard them. Now your chicken is ready for your favorite recipe or for the recipes in "Savory Stuffed Chicken Breasts," p. 57.

—Martha Holmberg,
editor-in-chief ♦

BY MARY D. DONOVAN

Many excellent cookbooks have debuted recently, but the following six books are exceptional for both their recipes and for the expert insider's views they offer of intriguing cultures, ingredients, and techniques.

Staff Meals from Chanterelle (Workman, \$30), by David Waltuck and Melicia Phillips, is a warm and friendly book that celebrates the restaurant tradition known as the "family meal." Anyone who has worked in a restaurant knows that the staff doesn't dine on dishes from the menu each night. Instead, they get together for a communal "family" meal before opening to the public. Often, and especially at David Waltuck's New York City restaurant Chanterelle, staff members are encouraged to share their own favorite family dishes.

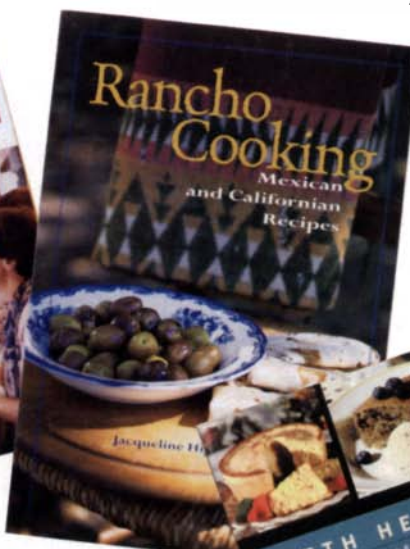
Time is short in a restaurant setting, so meals are either assembled on the spot from a few ingredients, or left to simmer while other tasks are attended to—a low-maintenance approach that translates well for today's busy families. The cultural diversity of Waltuck's staff makes for an eclectic collection of recipes grouped in categories such as Soup (try the Lentil Soup with Garlic Vinaigrette); Beef, Veal & Lamb (Lamb Tagine with Prunes & Honey or Mom's Braised Brisket with Carrots); Pork (Chinese Style Meatballs for a Crowd); Poultry (Roast Chicken with Root Vegetables & Cider); Seafood (Fish 'n Chips or Thai Seafood Salad);

Explore new flavors with six expert books



as well as pasta, sides, salads, dressings, dips, brunch dishes, breads, and desserts (my current favorite: the Peanut Lovers' Cookies).

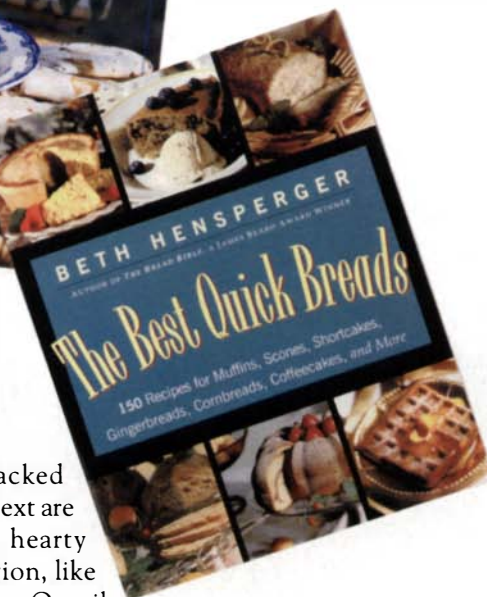
In **Rancho Cooking: Mexican & Californian Recipes** (Sasquatch Books, \$22), Jacqueline Higuera McMahen shares her heritage as an eighth-generation *ranchero* in a part of southern California where Mexican and Spanish culinary influences merged to become a unique cuisine. The recipes in this handsome book are grouped into chapters by ingredient or occasion. Recipes featuring chiles come first, with a serviceable set of guidelines for a variety of chiles. A recipe for Red Chile Sauce will become familiar through much use in other recipes, such as Classic Red Enchiladas, Rancho Chila-



quiles, and Stacked Enchilada Pie. Next are recipes for the hearty stews of the region, like Chile Colorado, Oxtail Stew, and Rancho Pozole. Grilled and barbecued foods are covered, as are the tortilla and other breads of the West, including Ma'dulce Enchiladas (strawberry enchiladas) and Grandmama's Potato Pan Rolls. The Rancho Comfort Food chapter offers recipes for eggs, beans, and rice, plus even more soups and chiles. Seafood dishes include Chilean Seafood Pie with Corn Topping, Bouillabaisse Chili, and Grilled Mussels with Salsa de Nopalitos. Further

chapters on Celebración and Picnics offer recipes like Chile-Rubbed & Roasted Turkey that deliver on the premise of the book: foods saturated with the vibrant flavors of California, Spain, and Mexico, blended and blurred on the ranchos by great cooks into a style all its own.

With **The Best Quick Breads** (Harvard Common Press, \$18), Beth Hensperger, a prolific writer of books about breads, has turned her attention to the familiar and homey quick bread



category. This softcover book offers 150 recipes, all with carefully worded and concise methods, in a straightforward, easy to use format. This is a working cookbook, one where you can find your own personal "best" recipes, and mark them for future reference, as I do, by dog-earing pages or by "flagging" them with a few drops of batter. In my copy you can find my new favorite cornbread recipe at a glance. This quick bread made with yogurt and butter-

milk is so flavorful and rich that you'll think twice about serving it with anything other than fresh butter. Banana Coffee Cake with a delicate, cakelike texture and an intense banana flavor, paired with the Bittersweet Chocolate Glaze, is elegant enough to serve as a dessert. Packed with scone recipes and scone lore, biscuits of all descriptions (savory and sweet), loaves, gingerbreads, coffee cakes, shortcakes, pancakes and waffles, popovers, and dumplings, there's enough here to keep you baking for years.

the Twisted Cheese Pie or the Greens Pie with Milk & Eggs.

There are no illustrations or photographs in this book, but the descriptive text paints a picture clear and inviting enough to lure you from the armchair to the market, and finally into the kitchen. Kochilas provides a list of specialty Greek food importers to help find local sources for ingredients not readily available at your corner market, and a few mail-order sources, too. Less an everyday cookbook, this serious work on a simple cuisine is more a culinary travel itinerary with plenty of stops in the homes and tavernas of Greece.

appetizers, salads, soups, little meals, entrées, condiments, and breads. Almost every page is dotted with tips and information, like the sidebar on "How to Clean and Cut Selected Mushrooms for a Ragoût," followed by a tempting recipe for Polenta with a Wild Mushroom Ragoût.

The primer in the back of the book is well illustrated with black and white photos that show great detail and texture. The same mushrooms are also pictured in full color on the book's end papers.

With the knowledge you gain from this book, you'll be able to go to the grocery store and select good-quality mushrooms to bring home and try in recipes such as

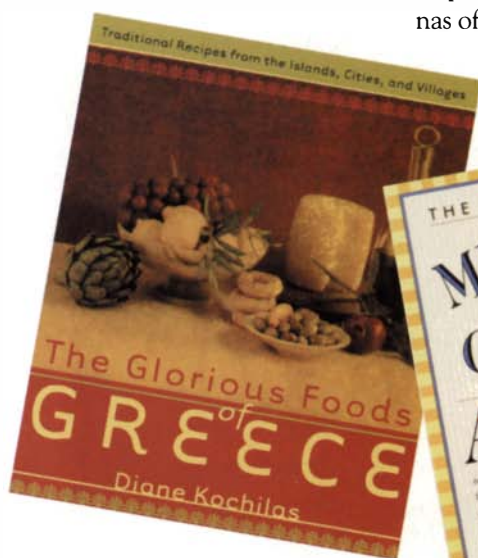
If you've ever wanted to try your hand at Japanese cooking (or you just want some new techniques for preparing fish or vegetables), then check out *The Japanese Kitchen* (Harvard Common Press, \$17), by Hiroko Shimbo. The first section of the book explores the basics of Japanese cuisine. Traditional cooking techniques and kitchen equipment are described in detail, with appropriate alternative suggestions like using a large, deep wooden salad bowl as a substitute for the wooden sushi tub called a *hangiri*. Information on key ingredients includes purchasing and storage information.

In the second part of her book, Shimbo sets forth 250 recipes written in a clear and engaging style that makes it simple for cooks to

prepare dishes such as Japanese Pot-Stickers (gyoza), Vegetable Tempura, Edamame Dip, Cubed Vegetable Miso Soup, Miso-Marinated Salmon, Classic Salt-Grilled Fish, Chicken Teriyaki with Orange, Japanese-Style Braised Spareribs, Hot Soba Noodles with Duck & Long Onion, and Tea-Flavored Rolled Cake.

For sushi lovers, there's a chapter that explains the techniques for preparing sushi rice and shaping it into several sushi dishes. Uncluttered line drawings illuminate the basic techniques.

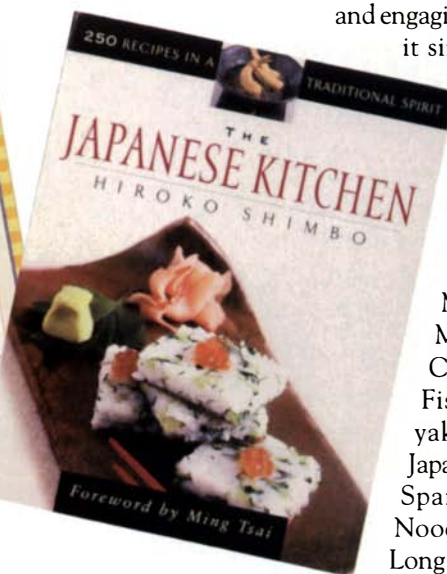
Mary D. Donovan is the senior cookbook editor for *The Culinary Institute of America*. ♦



You can explore familiar and not-so-familiar regions of Greece, such as the Ionian Islands, Thessaly, Crete, and Athens, with Diane Kochilas in *The Glorious Foods of Greece: Traditional Recipes from the Islands, Cities & Villages* (William Morrow, \$40). Try One-Pot Vegetable Stew from Ikaria (one of a sizeable selection of quickly made stews), Fresh Anchovies Baked with Onions from Macedonia, or any of the savory pies from Roumeli, like



Part cookbook, part mushroom ID guide, *The Mushroom Lover's Mushroom Cookbook & Primer* (Workman, \$17), by Amy Farges, will help you master the techniques of selecting and storing, cleaning, cooking, and preserving all sorts of mushroom varieties. The main part of the book offers 175 recipes divided into categories such as finger foods,



Wild Mushroom & Multi-grain Soup, Cauliflower Mushroom Fritters with Indian Dipping Sauce, Slow-Roasted Cremini with Barley Salad, Peppery Filets (as in filet mignon) with Ramps & Wild Mushrooms, Mushroom Fried Chicken with Shiitake Pan Juices, Woodsy Mushroom Pot Pie, and Wild Mushroom Manicotti.

Technique Class

Kitchen parchment can be ordered from the **King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue** (800/827-6836; bakerscatalogue.com). A half-pound roll of parchment is \$9; single sheets are available in 2¾-pound packs for \$15.

Kitchen Detail

For the spice jars, holders, and racks mentioned, try your local kitchen and home store, or **Crate & Barrel** (800/323-5461; crateandbarrel.com), **Lee Valley Tools** (800/267-8735; leevalley.com), or **Hold Everything** (800/840-3596; holdeverything.com). Finding an Indian wooden spice holder might take some searching, but **Kalustyan's** (212/685-3451) carries a metal one that is similar.

Burgers

To order **Great Hill Blue** cheese, visit greathillblue.com or call 888/

748-2208. To order **Shelburne Farms Cheddar**, call 802/985-8686 or visit shelburnefarms.org.

Baked Beans

The following offer a large selection of common and heirloom beans: **Elizabeth Berry** (for an order form and bean descriptions, write to Galina Canyon Ranch, PO Box 706, Abiquiu, NM 87510); **The Bean Bag** (800/845-2326; somethingbetternaturalfoods.com); or **Indian Harvest** (800/294-2433; indianharvest.com; note this company calls its yellow-eye beans Butterscotch Calypso).

Ravioli

Pasta machines (Atlas and Imperia are common brands) start at about \$30, ravioli molds cost about \$20, and ravioli stamps can often be found for as little as \$3. All of these items are



available from **Fante's Kitchen Wares Shop** (800/443-2683; fantes.com). **Gourmet Gallery** (888/253-6466; widerview.com/pasindex.html) sells molds and pasta machines, as does **Chef's Catalog** (800/338-3232; chefscatalog.com).

You can order "00" flour for ravioli pasta dough from **Teitel Brothers** (800/850-7055). **King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue** (800/827-6836; bakerscatalogue.com) sells an Italian-style flour similar to "00."

Ice-Cream Scoops

You can find ice-cream scoops by Oxo at many kitchen stores. **Williams-Sonoma** and **Crate & Barrel** carry the Zeroll models. These two web sites offer a wide variety of scoops: **Bigtray.com** and **Cooking.com**.

Beginning on p. 73, from left to right are: Vollrath color-coded portion-control disher (#16), Oxo Steel ice-cream scoop, Oxo nonstick beaked ice-cream scoop, Zeroll Zerolon ice-cream scoop, Zeroll Universal E-Z disher (#40), American Metalcraft 9-inch ice-cream spade, and Zeroll Tubmate ice-cream spade.

Cherry Desserts

Chef's Catalog (800/338-3232; chefscatalog.com) carries both styles of cherry pitters shown on p. 76.

Artisan Foods

To order fruit or preserves from **Frog Hollow Farms**, call 888/779-4511 or visit froghollow.com.



Photos: Scott Phillips

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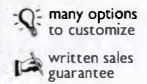

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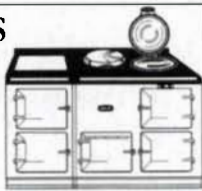
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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Cucumber-Tomato Salad	15	25	20	0	2	2.0	0	1.5	0	0	150	0	per 1/2-cup serving
Sweet & Sour Sicilian Braised Chicken	24	630	360	36	29	40	8	22	7	105	540	2	per serving
Fish Fillets <i>En Papillote</i>	29	470	270	37	8	30	10	12	6	125	520	1	per serving
Classic Hamburgers	39	250	110	32	0	13	5	6	1	55	580	0	per burger
Boston Baked Beans	42	190	60	8	26	7	3	3	1	5	380	8	per 1/2-cup serving
Ginger-Sesame Asparagus	46	100	60	2	9	7	1	3	3	0	490	2	per serving
Fava Beans w/Prosciutto, Mint & Garlic	46	200	140	9	7	15	2	11	2	15	1040	2	per serving
Fresh Peas w/Lemon & Chives	46	200	140	5	12	15	9	4	1	50	170	4	per serving
Orange-Pecan Green Beans	47	210	160	4	14	18	6	8	3	20	450	5	per serving
Multi-Purpose Baking Mix	50	130	60	2	15	7	4	2	0	20	180	1	per ounce
Herbed Cheese Buttermilk Biscuits	50	270	130	7	27	14	9	4	1	55	400	1	per 2 1/2-inch biscuit
Blueberry Scones	50	260	110	5	32	13	7	4	1	50	340	1	per scone
Shortcake Biscuits or Cobbler Topping	51	420	260	6	36	29	17	8	1	110	430	1	per 3-inch biscuit
Summer Vegetable Soup	54	330	100	20	41	11	2	6	2	45	690	6	per serving
Chicken Breast w/Prosciutto	60	430	250	40	2	28	11	9	6	125	1080	0	per serving
Chicken Breast w/Parmesan & Herbs	60	460	290	36	5	32	14	10	6	130	690	1	per serving
Chicken Breast w/Red Pepper & Olives	61	400	250	33	2	28	10	9	6	115	950	0	per serving
Basil Pesto	64	60	50	1	1	6	1	4	1	0	340	0	per tablespoon
Cilantro-Scallion Pesto	64	45	40	1	1	4.5	0.5	2.5	1.0	0	280	0	per tablespoon
Ravioli Pasta Dough	69	480	70	19	84	8	2	3	2	215	300	3	per 4 oz. serving
Sausage & Broccoli Raab Ravioli	70	1080	540	42	99	60	16	35	6	260	1390	11	per serving
Goat Cheese & Herb Ravioli	71	910	510	38	63	57	34	17	3	315	1280	4	per serving
Cherry Breakfast Focaccia	77	300	10	7	66	1	0	0	0.5	0	490	3	per serving
Cherry Custard Tart w/Sliced Almonds	78	560	290	9	60	33	17	11	3	155	105	3	per serving
Cherry, Mango, Kiwi & Mint Salad	79	80	5	1	18	0.5	0	0	0	0	15	2	per 1/2-cup serving
Poached Cherries	79	170	10	1	42	1.0	0	0	0.5	0	0	2	per 1/2-cup serving
Cherry Mousse	79	340	270	3	18	30	18	9	1	110	30	2	per serving
Beef Kebabs w/Soy Sauce & Cumin	90	410	210	42	6	23	8	12	1	115	1130	0	per serving

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

BY LESLIE REVSIN



Beef Kebabs with Soy Sauce, Cumin & Orange Zest

Lamb is also great in place of the beef. And should any sort of foul weather keep you from grilling outdoors, take comfort in knowing that in a pinch, a ridged grill pan can step up to the plate. *Serves four.*

1 Tbs. brown sugar
4 Tbs. soy sauce
1 large clove garlic
1½ tsp. ground cumin
¾ tsp. ground coriander
Pinch cayenne
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
or to taste
1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
¾ tsp. grated orange zest
2 Tbs. olive oil
1¼ lb. boneless rib-eye steak,
about 1½ to 2 inches thick and
cut into 1½- to 2-inch cubes
Sprigs of fresh cilantro or mint
and plain yogurt (optional)

In a large bowl, combine the brown sugar and soy sauce. Squeeze the garlic through a press held over the bowl, scraping off and adding the garlic that sticks to the bottom of the press. Whisk in the spices, lemon juice, and orange zest, and gradually whisk in the olive oil.

Set aside 2 Tbs. of the marinade. Toss the beef cubes in the bowl with the rest of the marinade and marinate the meat at room temperature, covered, for 30 min., (or for up to 8 hours in the refrigerator), turning the meat several times in the marinade.

Prepare a medium-hot charcoal fire or heat a gas grill.

Skewer the cubes, leaving about half an inch of space between each cube so they'll cook all around. Grill the meat, turning the skewers to brown on all sides to the point of slight charring, for about 8 min., depending on your grill, for medium to medium rare.

Push the meat off the skewers and onto plates, drizzle with the reserved 2 Tbs. marinade, and garnish with cilantro or mint sprigs and a spoonful of yogurt, if you like.

For quick grilling, think kebabs

In my house, summer officially begins when our grill gets dragged out of the garage and set up on the patio. (It doesn't matter that the date on my *New York Times* says April!)

Regardless of when summer starts at your house, its perennial promise is laid-back living and simple, sizzling dinners off the grill.

I first devised this dish with boneless lamb for my upcoming book and then discovered how much I like it with beef—especially when the beef was a thick rib-eye steak cut into chunks. I toss the big cubes of beef in a quickly assembled, Asian-flavored marinade. Although the cumin and coriander seeds taste best when freshly ground, you can save a step by using already ground spices. For this recipe, I like to squeeze the garlic through a press, which not only prevents having big, burnable pieces but is quicker, too. The beef can be marinated for as little as 30 minutes or as long as 8 hours to suit your schedule.

I use wooden skewers that I've soaked in water for at least 15 minutes to keep them from burning, but metal skewers eliminate the need for soaking. When threading the meat onto the skewers, I leave a little space between each piece so the heat can brown all the surfaces. I grill the kebabs over a medium-hot fire, but the soy sauce and brown sugar in the marinade can burn, so, when necessary, I move the skewers to a cooler part of the grill to finish cooking before they've gotten too dark.

Finally, grilled vegetables are a perfect accompaniment. And while it's popular to alternate meat and vegetables on the skewer, they often cook at different rates. To avoid ending up with barely cooked squash and collapsed cherry tomatoes, for example, I grill them separately to be sure that each gets the time it needs.

Leslie Revsin is the author of Great Fish, Quick (Doubleday). Her next book, about elegant, easy recipes, will be published by Time-Life. ♦

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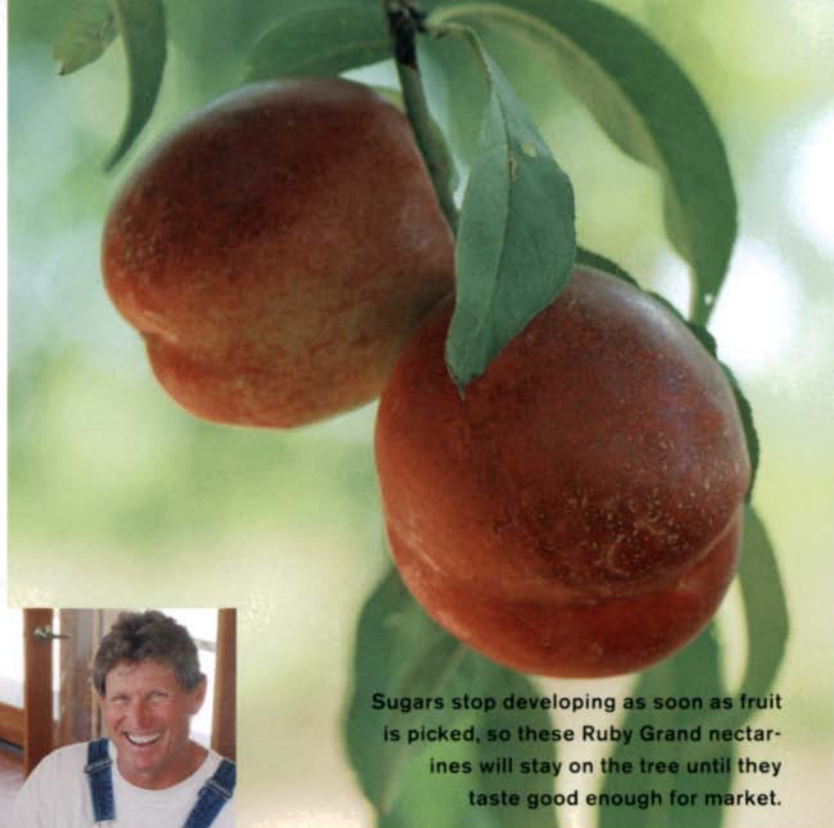
BY AMY ALBERT

The ripest fruit, the biggest flavor

“Farmer Al” Courchesne, owner of Frog Hollow Farm in Contra Costa County, California, was raised a city boy. So when he turned to peach farming, there was a lot he didn’t know—including the fact that commercially grown stone fruit is often harvested underripe in order to withstand shipping and storage.

But naïveté paid off, and flavor prevailed. Al picked and sold only ripe fruit, and 25 years later, Frog Hollow Farm is Certified Organic, with a reputation for some of the best-tasting varieties of peaches, apricots, plums, nectarines, and cherries anywhere. Large-scale farmers usually harvest at about 12° brix (a measure of sugar content), but Al picks his peaches at 17° to 18°. “I like to say that it just about exceeds the human threshold for pleasure,” he says with a mischievous smile.

While Al markets the fruit, his partner Becky Smith transforms Frog Hollow’s peaches, apricots, and nectarines into deeply flavorful preserves. As to why her jams taste so good, Becky, a former pastry chef, explains that she cooks the fruit in a shallow braiser (rather than in a deep kettle) for maximum evaporation in a short amount of cooking time. “And,” she adds, “I get to use our fruit, which has the best possible flavor and texture.”



Sugars stop developing as soon as fruit is picked, so these Ruby Grand nectarines will stay on the tree until they taste good enough for market.



Becky Smith and Al Courchesne sample the latest batch of Frog Hollow Farm preserves.



Photo: Amy Albert

Ripeness is read in a drop of juice. Al uses a refractometer to check the brix, or sugar content, of a Babcock white peach.

Jars of nectarine jam are filled one by one. Larger-scale producers might cook 300 pounds of fruit at a time and fill the jars by conveyor belt, but Frog Hollow preserves are made in 50-pound batches for more concentrated, tastier results.



This jar is brimming with ripe fruit flavor. Frog Hollow preserves contain just a touch of added sugar and no added pectin.

